Piero Favero

KING ARTHUR'S TRIBE

A New Anthropology of the Veneti

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I have been in a multitude of shapes,
Before I assumed a consistent form.
I have been a sword, narrow, variegated,
I will believe when it is apparent.
I have been a tear in the air,
I have been the dullest of stars.
I have been a word among letters,
I have been a book in the origin.
(Taliesin)

Perceval

by Piero Favero

To my child Alessio, fan of Merlin the wizard

Translated by Deborah Saidero from the University of Udine

INTRODUCTION

King Arthur's Tribe, like my previous essay *La dea veneta*, gathers clues to show the consistent possibility of assuming that the ancient people with a "Venetic name", who inhabited various areas of Europe, may have been culturally close. This hypothesis can be seen as a daring one, but it is not without a foundation. If this interpretation of the clues proves to be correct, in the near future it will be easier to undertake further and more scientific studies. However, a strictly scientific approach falls outside the purpose of this book since conclusive proof is the result of experimental applications which are reserved for the competence and combined efforts of archaeology and genetics experts.

With inductive method this book moves from mythology to archaeology and from speculations on cult to material culture. It is surely a "dangerous" method, but we should not exclude in advance the contribution that mythology and the interpretation of the Venetic cult can make to the combined efforts undertaken by a team of experts from various fields (i.e., anthropologists, historians, geneticists, etc.). The importance of interdisciplinary work that combines archaeology, linguistics, history and mythology was pointed out by Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994), who called this method Archaeomythology. It is commonly believed that all legends and myths have some basis of truth and sometimes it has also been proven by the facts. It is the same for the semi-divine genealogies which have been passed down by ancient peoples, who paid them the greatest attention even though these genealogies could be easily misused and manipulated (for example, it appears that the first Roman emperor Augustus asked Virgil to rebuild his genealogy to Venus through Aeneas).

If we analyse the "Urnfield culture" phenomenon – a late Bronze Age culture which was succeeded by the Este culture (that of the ancient Veneti) – it is clear that "religiousness" was very important in its widespread cult centred around the incineration of the dead. In a parallel way, the new religion spread symbolic messages, particularly the emblem of the *Solar Boat* (that is, a solar circle above the semi-circle of the boat), which was obsessively repeated in every shape and variant. The picture of the *Solar Boat* ended up being more and more stylised and essential: it was no longer necessary to depict the entire subject because its meaning was directly clear, just like the cross immediately implies all its drift for the Christians. How could a mysterious symbol from a Central European culture, situated near present-day Poland and Germany, arrive in the *Venetia* region? Through which routes? Beyond the borders of its original core, that is, the Lusatian civilization, there are some traces of this culture in Austria – to the south of the Danube – and, thus, sufficiently near the *Venetia*. Urnfields were found even as far as Sicily as witnessed by the one discovered in Milazzo, near a town curiously called "Venetico", which shows how widespread this cultural influence was.

The spread of the urnfields in the *Venetia* region as a purely "cultural" aspect is totally obvious. What remains to be proven is whether the transmission of this cultural phenomenon was somehow combined with a real migration of peoples, that is, whether the culture moved "on men's legs" or not. The hypothesis of a migration seems to be the most plausible because during the period around 1200 BC there was a general disruption in the settlement patterns of many European populations, which triggered a massive chain reaction, with a domino effect similar to an earthquake that led the populations to move in waves from Central Europe to the south and the west. The epicentre of this chain reaction was the Baltic area, that is, where the original centre – known as the Lusatian civilization – appeared. Colin Renfrew (Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn), Director of the McDonald Institute, assumes that the first horses tamed by mankind were just for food supply and only around 1200 BC horseback riding began to be important for military use. Horse riding thus became fundamental and decisive: it was faster and easier to handle than the preceding use of chariots (1600 BC) and it could have caused a military expansion in this turbulent Lusatian period rather than during the first Indo-European migrations (described in Gimbutas' classic theory as "wandering, pastoral, warlike" migrations).

Linguistics and archaeology are not able to solve the doubt whether the Lusatian civilization and

that of the Proto-Veneti was just *a cultural spread* or *a real migration* of people. Instead, the progress made in the genetics of migration can provide an answer to this question. It is fair to wonder whether a new "Lusatian Empire" was growing and about to conquer half of Europe, while the Empire of the Hittites was in decline. Why don't the ancient texts speak about it? Was it just a commercial empire or a military one? Amidst these epochal changes, the spaces in which the Veneti's ancestors typically moved also shifted and came to coincide with the trade routes. It is not, however, completely correct to talk about "trade relations", because the exchange mechanisms of the time were very distant from our modern idea of trade. Probably there were small groups of craftsmen who were masters in the art of working amber and tin and brought their raw materials with them as they travelled to the first proto-urban centres, including those that had risen in the *Venetia* plain like Frattesina and Este. Bartering could have been another form of trade used to exchange resources for basic necessities; or there was the "gift circuit", also in its sacral forms, as in the well-known example of the Hyperborean virgins who took their gifts to the Delos temple. It is well-documented that there was a prosperous trade among the sanctuaries in the *Venetia* and, in particular, among those located in border areas, because there were travelling pilgrims and people in passing who came from distant lands. In fact some of those sanctuaries – such as that of Mount Antares in Vittorio Veneto – coined their own currency to deal with such a great interchange. The most decisive travel mechanism could have been the need to create some strong points along the long-distance trade routes and these outposts ended up becoming settlements with the passing of time. The settlements then needed a military defence and this implied the arrival of Venetic soldiers and their families, so that some of the most strategic hub locations ended up becoming embryonic cities.

This book investigates every hypothetical connection with Venetic culture by encompassing a wide range of spatial and temporal references. In Medieval literature the legend of King Arthur and his worthy knights achieved an unprecedented success. Where does this irresistible charm come from? Probably the aura of mystery on whether King Arthur was a real historical figure or just part of a myth was a great inspiration for many writers and readers. If we knew his dates of birth and death, the name of the castle where he lived with his court and which reign among the ones known in Great Britain he belonged to, then King Arthur would be just another one of the many leaders who appear in history books. But it is not so. Behind the strength of this powerful and archaic myth there is its power to awaken the heart and soul of the modern man, as it talks about the ancient and remote times when it was possible to combine courage, loyalty and moral dignity even in times of devastation like during the invasion of the Saxons.

In the imagination of common people, King Arthur was often relegated to children's stories or to Celtic folklore, but historians never stopped trying to place this character in the framework of the British Renaissance after the Roman retreat from the island. In England there are thousands of places which are somehow associated with King Arthur. The ancient authors all agree on the basic facts, but they suggest many variants of his legend. Modern scholars are often sufficiently documented and well-informed, but sometimes they are mistaken when they insist on proving the rightfulness of their identification of King Arthur with a certain historical figure. By doing this they seek to sacrifice or intentionally undermine all the elements and the proof against their thesis. Some scholars even attempt to perfectly adapt the dates and names of a king they think could have been King Arthur, even though the essence of that historical character has nothing to do with the genuine purposes of the King from the legend. There's no point in hiding the fact that the research is difficult. For some, it may just seem an impossible mission or an unnecessary and pointless struggle. Many have tried... and many have failed; others have come to a dead end. Some renounced while others deceived themselves with delirious ideas. We should remember that, first and foremost, the search for the Holy Grail is a spiritual search: in this deep sense we cannot exclude that someone perhaps did succeed, even though we cannot know it for sure. It is curious that nowadays – after 1,500 years – the search for the Grail is alive and coveted in the writings of many contemporary authors, even if it is transferred into a historical and scientific search. This explains why there are many writers, TV programs in search of the sensational and web pages that try to prove King Arthur's true identity once the data comes in. The *Quest for the Holy Grail* has been taken up again, waiting for someone to find it.

For the authors convinced of having identified the figure of King Arthur in a precise area of England or French Brittany, the main problem is to prove the untruthfulness of other allocations different from theirs, which refer to other geographic areas, other toponyms or to other literary references. For example, those who are convinced that King Arthur was Scottish consider all "southern" traces false; those who want King Arthur to be Breton disregard all the English allocations. The only way out is to carefully study "the concentration" of references to King Arthur region by region. After having collected all the data in a detailed and complete way, it will be possible to apply the statistical method to create a map of King Arthur's toponyms in which the numerical frequency of the localizations will clearly signal the greater or lesser rooting of the myth region by region. We can make the same map by using the topographical references to King Arthur's relatives and battles or the adventurous enterprises of the Knights of the Round Table.

This statistical assessment is rather complex and imposes to accept all topographical identifications as data even without verifying their truthfulness. The dichotomy between true and false is, in fact, a prerogative of historical truth but subsides in myth. Unfortunately, amidst the problems which arise during this analysis we also have to include the fakes made "in bad faith" by the countless monarchs who wanted King Arthur to be considered their ancestor, or by the kingdoms and peoples who wanted to possess his myth due to the power it wielded over the crowds. Astonishing is the fact that even the Germans tried to do this, even though they are distant descendants of the Saxons, that is, historical enemies of King Arthur. Such a paradoxical fact is still documented in historical archives and the quest for the Grail (intended here as a physical object) was taken very seriously by Heinrich Himmler, who was an inspirer of the SS and the hierarch responsible for Nazi propaganda. He commissioned the scholar Otto Rahn to look for the sacred chalice; this student of the occult believed that the Holy Grail was kept in Montsegur (in the Pyrenees), that is, the last Cathar fortress to fall into the hands of the Holy Inquisition. The very Nazis – who already had managed to prove the Aryan race of Jesus Christ – introduced anti-Semitic sentences in the books about the Grail that Rahn wrote. He soon fell to misfortune both because he did not find the longed for Grail and because he was accused of being homosexual and of coming from a Jewish family.

King Arthur's history merges with a very ancient cultural tradition which may not necessarily have Celtic roots only, as it is currently believed by many. As with every complex myth, there could have been some inputs from other traditions which are not typically Celtic. We must however acknowledge that it takes a great deal of courage to claim that King Arthur's legend was born in the Venetic culture, especially if we consider that all the books on this topic (innumerable texts published in numerous countries and translated into all languages) never mention the Veneti. Nevertheless the famous knight **Peredur** (Parsifal) was the chief of a Veneti tribe: the Venedoti. Simon Andrew Stirling states confidently that King Arthur was a Scottish lord; Graham Phillips wants to prove that he was Welsh; Gwenc'hlan Le Scouëzec believes he was surely Breton. Yet, it is plausible to put forward the Venetic hypothesis as well. But why? Simply because there were populations who had a Venetic name in Brittany, Wales and Scotland. This evidence, of course, is not sufficient alone, since we know that the legend of King Arthur is ubiquitous on the Atlantic coasts. It is, nonetheless, necessary to point out that in Brittany the places of the Arthurian cycle "are concentrated" especially in the Morbihan area of the "Veneti", in North Wales they are in the

Pytheas' journey to Abalus.

Venedotia (Gwynedd) of the "Venedoti", in Scotland they are concentrated in the Angus and in the Manau areas of the "Venicones". In this kind of research the point of view is essential: there is a general mechanism for which a certain perspective does not allow you to see a given subject, while it is perfectly visible from another observation point. From *the Venetic point of view* – thoroughly used in this book – it is not crucial to discover the historical identity of King Arthur: the goal is to prove that the Arthurian myth did not originate from a single person but it arose from a specific tribe and from its spiritual tradition, namely the search for the Grail of the Veneti.

If it is true that the Veneti arrived in Brittany from the Baltic Sea before the Celtic expansion, then it is also true that they took their myths with them. The mythical island of Avalon would thus simply be the island of Abalus described by Pytheas along the coast of the Baltic Sea and might be Samland (today's Sambia peninsula), where the waves of the sea gently brush the amber deposits. Pytheas was indeed the first to discover that amber came from the northern coasts. In his time, amber was in great demand and thus celebrated by poets and mythographers even more than gold and other precious gems. It does not come as a surprise that this island full of amber deposits entered the realm of myth, since it was typical of Greek mentality to create two levels of knowledge: the scientific / naturalistic one and the mythological one. *Abalus* was called *Basilia* "the island of the king" by the ancient Greek historian Timaeus (Aballach was thought of as the founding king of Avalon). Instead Xenophon of Lampsacus called it *Baltia*, so that the island eventually gave its name to the Baltic Sea, which was known by the Romans as *Mare Suebicum* or *Mare Sarmaticum*.

The ancestral tradition is a continuous line that goes from the past to the future and integrates into the present, since it travels with a people on their migrations, it passes through the centuries unharmed and it outlives the empires and their enforced civilizations. When did the archaic symbol of the Solar Boat, enshrined on Artemis' temple, cease to be passed on? During the Bronze Age it was widespread in many areas of Central Europe as far as the Italian peninsula and was still found during the Middle Ages in the Arthurian cycle, where the Knight Lohengrin arrives in a boat pulled by a swan, in order to take his loved one as his bride. In the Breton tradition the motif of the "dead vessel" is documented above all in the Île d'Arz in Morbihan. Curiously, *arzh* is the Breton word for 'bear', the animal dear to Artemis, which embodies 'the breath of the Earth'. This takes us back to the starting point of our myth. Within the field of mythology it is only relatively meaningful to demonstrate at all costs the historical transition of a certain myth from one context to another. It is actually a minor matter whether or not we succeed in proving that the myth of the Solar Boat – born in the Urnfield culture – was passed on by the Sun Goddess to the Homeric Helios, then to the context of Apollo and finally to the legend of the Knight of the Swan. Mythology and the sacred are living in a timeless dimension without sequences. Paradoxically, even if two similar symbols appear in distant and non-communicating contexts, their deep meaning and strength are the same, despite the differences they may take on in different cultures. This is even more so, if the echo of a symbol lives in the cultural context of peoples with common roots and becomes an integral component of their tradition.

First part

THE WEST

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The prince turned into a bear, who waits to be awakened by a maiden's kiss that will bring him back to life (Warsaw).

Few authors so far have looked for parallel myths in the Baltic and Atlantic antiquity. Should we manage to find such ancient matches, we would still have to determine whether they result from a cultural influence or a migration of peoples from the shores of the Baltic Sea to those of the Atlantic.

There seems to be an ideal contact that, spreading till the early Middle Ages, would in particular explain the origin of the Arthurian myth set in the areas inhabited by the Britons. The etymology of the isle of Avalon, which was sacred to King Arthur's tradition, takes us straight to the heart of the problem. Pliny thought that the isle of Abalus was a one-day journey away from the amber deposit shores and Timaeus called this Baltic island Basilia (in Greek the adjective *basileia* means 'royal'), maybe referring to the seat of a king. Therefore, it was not without a rational basis that Jean Markale pointed out the connection between Abalus and Avalon in his writings

Nowadays in Warsaw the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Mercy, the city's patron saint, houses a well-known painting of the Virgin. Outside the Sanctuary there is, instead, a stone bear which is said to keep a prince imprisoned under a spell. The young man turned into a statue of pain, as his love for a girl was not returned. According to legend, the enchanted youth in the shape of the statue is still waiting for his beloved one to kiss him and bring him back to life as a prince. The meaning of the legend is a certain latency, which recalls King Arthur's intermediate state between the life and death as he awaits to be reawakened on the isle of Avalon (asleep like the Titan Kronos). As everybody knows, the name "Arthur" comes from *arktos* ('bear'), but less known is the fact that in Polish lower Silesia – near Mount Ślęża – the cult of the bear is documented by the votive statue of a big stone bear which can be attributed to the Lusatian civilization. Further north the bear, who was the incarnation of the ancestors' souls, was the most sacred animal in Finnish mythology, so much so that it was never referred to with its real name but always alluded to through nicknames, e.g. *kontio* ('inhabitant of the lands').

The golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, which were the object of Heracle's journey to the far West, recall the famous apples of Avalon. Both the bear and the apples of the Hesperides appear in the legend of Atalanta:

When her father abandoned her when she was still a baby, Atalanta was saved by Artemis who sent a bear to breastfeed her. In order to please her father, and confident of her abilities,

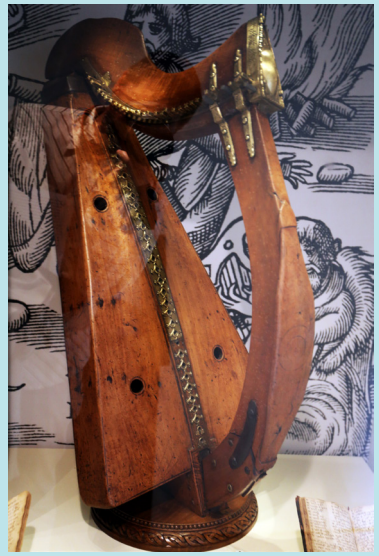
Hippomenes wins the race against Atalanta, who stops to pick the golden apples.

the nymph promised to marry only the suitor who could defeat her in a race. A terrible condition was introduced: every suitor who didn't win would be killed. No one defeated her until Melanion arrived (also known as Hippomenes). As he was very much in love with her, he took up the dangerous challenge after asking Aphrodite for help. The goddess gave him three golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides and, following her advice, he dropped them one by one during the race. Atalanta was so attracted by the golden fruits that she stopped every time to pick them up, thereby lagging behind and in the end losing the race.

In Baltic mythology the apple is the symbol of the Sun and the personification of the goddess Saulė. Her symbol is in fact the fallen red apple, similar to the sun's globe at sunset. In Latvian songs (the *dainas* or *tautas dziesmas*), the apple is made of gold like the boat of Saulė's nocturnal journey.

Another "Venetic" animal, the aquatic bird, establishes a cultural bridge between the Baltic and the Atlantic: the aquatic bird on the head of Radegast (a god of the western Slavs), despite bizarre and unusual in iconography, yet it is also found in Brittany by the so-called *Goddess of Dinéault*, who has a goose on her head. The bronze statuette dates back to the Roman Period, when the goddess was probably identified with the goddess Minerva, as she had features of a Birgit or Reitia type-goddess. Igraine, a name whose etymology comes from *goose*, is Arthur's mother and Arthur's helmet is called *Goswhif*, which means 'white goose'. This Arthurian iconography would therefore be archaic and prior to the British exodus that affected the Atlantic coasts from Wales to Brittany in the 5th and 6th centuries. Furthermore, a bird perched on a helmet also appears in the Adriatic *Venetia* on the popular statuette of the crouched archer (which dates back to the 5th century BC).

The Goddess of Dinéault



Scottish harp

The land *Hyperborea* was identified with Great Britain for the first time by Hecataeus of Abdera (the 4th century BC Thracian traveller and historian), as is reported in an explicit fragment by Diodorus Siculus:

In the areas beyond the Celtic land there is, in the middle of the ocean, an island which is as big as Sicily. This island is located north and is inhabited by the Hyperboreans, who are so called because they live beyond the place where the wind of the north blows (Borea); it is fertile and productive for every harvest and it has an extraordinarily temperate climate.

Hyperborea had a connection with Apollo in the Greek legend. Hecataeus of Abdera also wrote that the Hyperboreans had a "circular temple" on the island, but Stonehenge – the observatory of solstices including the winter solstice and the setting of the lunar movements at the horizon (that were thought to have helped forecast the lunar eclipses) – was certainly not Hyperborean nor Celtic, as it dates back to 3000 BC. In 90 BC Pseudo-Scymnus wrote that Borea had a pillar that was erected in its name at the edge of the sea and was situated at the extreme limit of the Gallic land. Others claimed that this was the geographic reference to the north of France and that *Hyperborea* was to be identified with the British Isles that are situated just beyond the English Channel. Ptolemy and Marcian of Heraclea, a Greek geographer of the 4th century AD, also located *Hyperborea* in the North Sea, which they called "Hyperborean Ocean." It is interesting that, according to these classical authors, Gaul and the Celts were limited to France, while another non-Celtic people – that is the Hyperboreans – inhabited Great Britain. Therefore, we cannot exclude that the Hyperboreans who settled Great Britain may have migrated from the Baltic: if it is true (like some believe) that in Pomerania the Baltic island of Rügen was the seat of the god Apollo, to whom amber was sacred. The Baltic origin of the myth that was transferred to the island would also be attested by the inscription *Apollini Mapono* by the Sarmatians, a Baltic people stationed in Ribcester.

The presence of the cult of Apollo is well-attested in Southern Scotland in gravestones dating back to the Roman times that were engraved with the equivalent name of Maponos, like in *Deo Mapono* in Vindolanda or like in the inscription in Corbridge *Deo Mapono Apolloni* (which repeats the reference to Apollo). The *Ravenna Cosmography* mentions a *locus Maponi* in Southern Scotland, which is recognizable in Dumfriesshire or in some other place in Galloway. The Maporiton site is identified instead with Ladyward, near Lockerbie. In Scotland there are also the Lake of Mabon (Lochmaben) and the Mabon stone (Clochmabenstane). Iconography leaves no doubt about the identification with

Apollo: in a statue Mabon holds a harp (therefore not all harps are Celtic) and in an altar he is accompanied by Diana, the goddess of hunting. Mabon is the name of the autumn equinox, which is specular to the spring equinox. The idea of splitting up the year into semesters already existed among the Paphlagonians (Northern Anatolia), as witnessed by their belief that the gods were locked up in prison during the winter months and were freed in the summer.

As it is logical to expect from the premises of cultural unity among the Atlantic Veneti, even in Ireland – and more precisely in Donegal (inhabited by the Venicni) – some authors associate Maponos with the son of Dagda who is called Oengus Mac in-Og (Angus).

The same name appears in Wales too in the text *Mabinogion*, as Mabon ap Modron, the son of the Mother goddess (Matrona). Mabon was kidnapped three nights after his birth and was imprisoned for a long time, until he was freed by King Arthur. The very name *Mabinogion* took its origin from the god, as did also the lost text *Lai du Mabon*. Interesting was the development in the *Mabinogion* of the tale on Culhwch Ac Olwen, a descendant of Cunedda and cousin of King Arthur who was freed by Arthur when he had already become the oldest living creature in the world.

We can ponder how the myth of Maponos existing in Scotland managed to reach Wales and its *Mabinogion* literature: the answer can be found in the migration of King Cunedda. In Brittany, instead, it is not clear if it already existed or if it arrived with the migration of the Britons who were escaping from the Saxons. In Brittany, anyhow, we find the knight Mabonagrain in the poem *Erec* by Chrétien de Troyes, while in Ulrich's *Lanzelet* he becomes Mabuz, son of the Lady of the Lake.

The Scottish toponym *fonto Mabono* can be directly connected with the *fons Aponi* or *aquae Aponie* of Abano, an ancient health spa in the province of Padua, on whose hill Montirone there was a temple dedicated to the god "Aponus" (that is, Apollo), who dispensed health.

Where was Apollo's mysterious original seat then? In the *Venetia* region? In the Baltic? Or in Great Britain? Considering chronological order is always indicative: Hecataeus of Abdera – who wrote about the Hyperboreans – lived in the 4th century BC, but the name of the Hittite god *Apaliunas* is more ancient and seems to be a reflection of *Apeljon*, which was an archaic form of the name Apollo. *Apaliunas* is attested in the Manapa-Tarhunta letter and is considered to be the guardian deity of Wilusa (Troad). Simultaneously, in Homer the god Apollo sided with the Trojans and built up the city walls. Thanks to the Eneti of Paphlagonia mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad*, we can thus suppose a wide connection with the cult of Apollo that extended from one extreme to the other of the amazing Ponto-Baltic-Atlantic route.

It seems that the solar cult of Apollo was the evolution and shift toward male domination of an earlier female solar cult, similar to the one of the goddess Saulė. A clue of this passage and of the change of the deity's sex as well, is the persistence of the solar symbolism of the apple both in Saulė and in the root of the name Apollo/*Apeljon* (the indo-e. root of apple is *abel*). The swan – the bird of the Solar Boat – was the vehicle used by both Apollo and Aphrodite, the goddess of the golden apple and protectress of the Trojans.

The spread of the Urnfield culture toward Brittany and southward, according to J. R. Maréchal (1959)

At present, proof that connects the Venetic population between Baltic Sea and Brittany seems to be missing. The only hint is the assonance between the name of the Venedi of Poland and the Veneti of Brittany, but clearly we need more. The mid-Channel with its facing shores was a major route node not only between Britain and the Continent, but also between the Atlantic coasts and the North Sea with the Baltic beyond. The Slovenian priest Davorin Trstenjak (1817-1890) considered it possible that the early Veneti may have migrated from the Baltic to Brittany by sea. There could have been a commercial reason for such a migration. Indeed, there is proof of an amber route that reached the Atlantic in the Bronze Age, since amber from that period was found in Brittany, in Côtes-d'Armor (Hermitage). Later on, in Brittany the Veneti might have considered more convenient the tin trade from the mines in Cornwall and in neighbouring Devon.

The Urnfield culture started to influence Armorica around 1100 BC as its warriors passed through on their southern expansion. It is commonly believed that the spread of the Urnfield culture in Brittany was very weak; however, it would be more correct to say that it affected the peninsula in a localised way. More precisely, ceramics with the typical features of the Urnfield culture were discovered in a delimited but significant way in the Morbihan region, right in the middle of the settlement of the future Veneti of Armorica. Well-made double and globular ceramics with the black paint of eastern facies (similar to those of Eastern France) were found in the area of Carnac in Trinité-sur-Mer, Pendrec en Crach and by the stones of Kermario – at 30 km from the present city of Vannes. These late small vases date back around to 800 - 750 BC. If we consider the period, they cannot have at all belonged to Celtic populations, but maybe to those Proto-Veneti from the Urnfield culture who migrated to Brittany from the Baltic area. We have to keep in mind that for the Adriatic Veneti the Balto-Venetic crossroads of Frattesina settlement officially date dates back to a few centuries earlier (12th cent. BC). In Morbihan, the isle of Belle-Île-en-Mer was formerly called Vindilis and, in the area of Bordelane, the island still has a necropolis of the Urnfield culture which dates back to the 10th cent. BC, between the end of the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Ceramic urns discovered near Lann-Tinikei in Plomeur (Morbihan) date back to the transition phase between Hallstatt and old La Tène: they were used as cremation urns and were unearthed in mainly flat cemeteries that

Urn in "fingerprint style" in Morbihan (Plomeur), 5th century BC

often had erected and decorated stones. Ceramics with decorations that recall the Urnfield style were also found in Elven, in the area of Morbihan, and there might have been a spread of urnfields in lower Normandy as well (the area of the Venelli near Breton coast). About 30 km from Vannes, in Damgan, evidence that dates back to the end of the Bronze Age and pieces of vases with "fingerprints" were discovered. Other fingerprints appear in the finds from the northern coast of Brittany near the Grosse Roche of Saint-Jacut-de-la-Mer, and, in the Morbihan region, in settlements of the late Bronze Age such as Kerlande en Brandivy and Vivier à Quiberon.

The Urnfield-type settlements found in the heart of Morbihan, the core of the Venetic settlement in Brittany, open up possible connections with the corresponding Baltic culture: this could be the missing link between the Baltic Veneti and the Atlantic Veneti. Confirmation could come from recent linguistic analyses. Not much is known about the language of the Veneti from Brittany, but among the rare Morbihan inscriptions there is the plural dative typical of the Veneti in the Plumergat inscription "*atrebo aganntobo*". Jadranka Gvozdanović, head of the Slavic Institute at the prestigious German University of Heidelberg (founded in 1386), pointed out some common elements between the Vannetais dialect and the phonological-type reconstruction of the Veneti from Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, there is no heritage of written texts that belongs to the Veneti of the East. Nevertheless, Gvozdanović was able to investigate and identify some indirect traces: in Vannetais the bi-syllabic palatalization model which follows a vowel *i-like* is clearly a reminiscence of the third palatalization in the Slavic language. Moreover, the asymmetric lenition of the *g'* into *j* in Vannetais is also a clear reminiscence of the asymmetric lenition in the Slavic language.

People from Brittany that do genetic tests come out closer to Welsh than to the central French average. In ancient times and for many centuries to come, Brittany belonged to an Atlantic cultural unity that included the neighbouring coasts of Great Britain. According to other scholars, the Veneti of Armorica are instead classified as a Belgian tribe. The Belgians indeed took part in the naval battle against Caesar with the Veneti and a branch of the Veneti joined the Belgian tribe of Hampton, in England. Both Strabo and Posidonius described the Armoricans as Belgians. It should, however, be pointed out that in Armorica there were a lot of other tribes apart from the Veneti and that Julius Caesar listed seventeen tribes as Belgians, but the Veneti of Brittany – who were well-known by Caesar – do not appear in this list. The association of the Veneti with the Belgians seems more a classification based on territorial expression and a common naval ability, rather than on a real cultural and ethnic homogeneity. In fact, modern scholars include a significant number of Germanic tribes alongside Celtic ones in the heterogeneous Belgian

group. Incidentally, the concept of "Celts" is an imposed notion that comes from Greek and Roman historiographers. Edward Dawson and Peter Kessler describe the Belgian spread in this way: "It seems that this wave of Celts was formed by maritime tribes who lived along the northern Atlantic and/or the Baltic coasts. They were known as Belgian and were apparently a branch of Celts who settled in Northern Europe, even if there is much speculation about their exact localisation. The data available generally show settlements in the north of Germany and maybe in the area of Northern Poland connected with the Oxhöft culture, too. This not well-known archaeological culture developed in the area of present-day Eastern Pomerania (near the lower course of the Vistula) from the 2nd cent. BC to the 1st cent. AD, after the previous 'Pomeranian culture'. Its dating coincides with the mass migration of a new population from Northern Germany".

In Brittany and in the southwest of England – from the pre-Roman Age onwards – the Veneti had distinctive forts along the coastal promontories, as Caesar himself reported. For a long time archaeologists looked for connections with other forts bearing a similar appearance in Atlantic Scotland and tried to prove the existence of migrations towards Scotland during the Iron Age as the extension of the waterway that goes from Brittany to the southwest of England. The archaeological evidence shows, however, that these forts are more ancient than what was believed. Therefore, the data could be compatible with the antiquity of the Proto-Venetic Urnfield settlement in Brittany (even 800 BC according to Anthony Ambrozic). Durable is likewise the belief that even the fortified "hill forts" which are extensively present in Scotland in the area inhabited later by the Venicones tribe – from the region of Angus to the estuary known as Forth – could have been introduced by the Urnfield culture. Certainly the "timber framing" construction of these hill forts belongs to a continental tradition, as Julius Caesar had noticed at the time in the *murus gallicus*.

Curious and not easy to classify are the fingerprint style ceramics discovered in England in the *Vale of York*, which covers the area between the Humber River to the south and the Tees River to the north (excavation sites of Staple Howe and Scarborough). The current political borders between England and Scotland have little significance from an archaeological point of view and at the time the *Vale of York* region had more similarities with the north of the island. The time frame of the evidence dates back to the Hallstatt C period (800 - 650 BC). It is also interesting to notice that the area between the eastern ridge of the Pennines and the *Vale of York* later became the settlement of the Brigantes, a tribe who lived in the areas of *Vinnovion* (Binchester), *Eboracon* (York) and *Isurium* (Alborough).

A funerary urn which preserved a small treasure, including an amber necklace, was found in Scotland at Balmashanner – a region of Angus that was later inhabited by the Venicones. Not far away, a bronze cauldron with necklace studs and a foil decorated with many little rings (the stylistic print of the object lasted until

Amber necklace, Scotland (Angus)

the 1st century AD ca.) was found in Kincardine Moss, near Stirling in the Stirlingshire. The weak ring junctions suggest that the cauldron had a symbolic use rather than a practical one and was probably buried as a gift to the gods between 600 and 400 BC.

As for the origin of the Picts (the ancient inhabitants of Scotland), Bede thought that they came from Scythia. According to what the classical authors reported, the position and extension of Scythia changed over time according to its history: not only did it incorporate Ukraine – which was inhabited by the Scythians from the 8th century BC onwards – but also Poland and the Sarmatic Ocean (better known as the Baltic Sea). In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which was written in 731, Bede explains how the Picts sailed first to Ireland, where they were not allowed to settle; so they went on to Northern Britain. Nennius reported that Dál Riata descended from a nobleman from Scythia and in 1320 the Scottish barons still remembered their ancient origin from Scythia in the *Declaration of Arbroath*. It must not be forgotten, however, that the foundation myth of the Britons poses their origin in the southwest, in Troy, through a migration of their Trojan founder Brutus to the isle of Albion (inhabited by the giants, that is 'the Titans').

In order to find "the missing link" between the Baltic and the Atlantic area we need to solve the enigma about the origin of the Veneti of Armorica. Solid and trustworthy archaeological data is necessary, while debatable linguistic argumentations about the origin of their name will not suffice. Knowing that the ethnonym of the Veneti from Brittany derives from the Celtic root **veni* (breed, race, clan, kinship) or from the Indo-European root **ven* 'bounded by social duties, federates' does not solve nor close the problem in a scientific way. The eminent 20th century French linguist André Martinet argued that around the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC the Veneti – who spoke an Indo-European language – had settled in the area of current Poland. Part of them followed the Celtic migrations westward and were at the end completely absorbed by the Celts, while another part migrated southward and were influenced by the Italic idioms; the rest (the *Wenden*) remained in Poland, where they were first influenced by the Germans and then by the Slavs, with whom they fused themselves in the 5th century.

Surprisingly, some aid to solve the Venetic question unexpectedly comes from the world of medicine and precisely from a cardiologic study published by J. L. Hebert. Arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia (ARVD) is a rare biventricular cardiomyopathy that primarily involves the right ventricle. It mainly affects the young male population whilst doing sporting activities and arises from the right ventricle generating tachyarrhythmia that can lead to a sudden death. The actual distribution of the ARVD in Europe seems to faithfully cover the areas settled by the Veneti, namely, the basin of the Vistula, the Adriatic Gulf and, in particular, the Armorican Massif of Brittany.

In France, genetic spread of R1b-L21 haplogroup is mainly present in historical Brittany, including Vendée and Lower Normandy. Brittany was repopulated by massive immigration of insular Britons in the 5th century due to pressure from the invading Anglo-Saxons. However, it is possible that L21 was present in Armorica since the Iron Age or the Bronze Age given that the tribes of the Armorican Confederation of ancient Gaul already had a distinct identity from the other Gauls and had maintained close ties with the British Isles.

ROUTE TO ALBION AND BACK

The supposed routes of the Veneti on the Atlantic coasts: 1) from Brittany to Ireland (Donegal) and to Scotland 2) descent with King Cunedda from Scotland to the north and south of Wales 3) return to Brittany in the 5th-6th century AD under the pressure of the Anglo-Saxons and, maybe, due to the lack of bread in 536-539 (Irish Annals) caused by the volcanic ash cloud, which covered the northern hemisphere for two years, following the eruption of the Ilopango (El Salvador).

Despite the serious defeat by Caesar and the Latinization of the Breton cities, the presence of the Veneti in Armorica continued. Caesar adopted a propagandistic attitude by exaggerating the consequences of his victory in order to make a good impression on the Senate and equal Pompey's military victories in the East (who achieved his third triumph in 61 BC). In the 2nd cent. AD, the Veneti were still the most influential people among the tribes of Brittany; they had gone back to being "the masters of the sea" and, together with the Coriosolites, dominated commerce toward the British Isles with tin, salt and *garum* (a fermented fish sauce used by the Romans as a spice). During the Roman occupation there was a flourishing trade with the Rhine Valley, along the tin route, and in the following centuries the Veneti gained ground in the region of Guérande to the detriment of the neighbouring Namnètes local tribe. As shown by the Tabula Peutingeriana (4th cent. AD), unlike the Veneti of the upper Adriatic, the Veneti of Armorica were still thriving four centuries after the defeat. This is an important evidence of their continuity and identity. In the 4th century AD their coins went through a period of stagnation probably because of the Saxons. However, when the Saxon invasion of Great Britain forced the Bretons to leave the island and to flee to Brittany, there was no interruption in the archaeological tradition of the Veneti: the native Armoricans continued to use the same ceramic models and coins. A contraction of the territory of the Veneti occurred only in the 6th cent., when Guérande was reconquered by the Namnètes.

It is possible that the Roman presence in Armorica, from Caesar onwards, influenced a certain migratory flow of the Armorican Veneti from the Breton coasts to the peninsular inland and then from Brittany to Great Britain, where they may have joined those Veneti who already lived on the island. At first sight the uneasy reconstruction of these movements probably involved the three passages listed below.

1) Although the *De Bello Gallico* reports that, after the Veneti's naval defeat by Caesar, all the commoners were captured and the Venetic Senate was killed (*omni senatu necato*), some of those who did not accept the Roman yoke managed to migrate to Great Britain by sea. There, they were welcomed by the Venetic insular colonies situated along the trade routes which had dominated both banks of the English Channel for a long time (it is known that before the Roman conquest the Venetic traders went to Cornwall in search of tin minerals and also had a Contact Zone in Wessex). Not only rebels, but also entire families of colonists migrated northward to the insular colonies, where there were probably new opportunities, more freedom for commercial action and better possibilities of survival. The gravitational axis of the Veneti thus moved from the mainland to the isles.

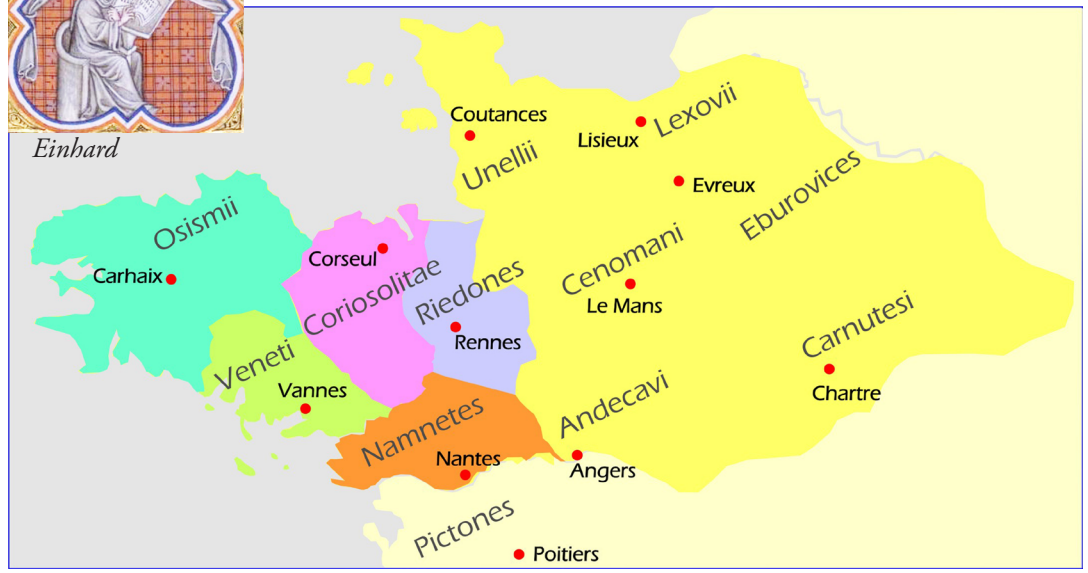
Then, as the Roman legions advanced toward Great Britain, the Venetic runaways retreated further north to Scotland, just beyond the Antonine Wall border. According to the 4th century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, the Veneti bravely faced the Atlantic several times, pushing themselves far beyond the known lands, to the legendary "last Thule" described by the Greek writer Pythia. At the time of the last Roman emperors, Thule seems to have corresponded to the territory far beyond the Antonine Wall, that is, the Vespasian area reported by Richard of Cirecenster. Beyond the Wall lived, in fact, the ancient tribe of the Venicones. In the Venicones' name the *t* becomes *c*, with the addition of the genitive plural *-on*. "Venetkens" (Isola Vicentina, 2nd cent. BC) is the first attestation of the ethnonym in the *Venetia* and has a clear assonance with Venicones.

If the Veneti were forced to leave the boundaries of the territory controlled by Rome, it means that they were hostile to some Roman factions and that submission was impossible for certain Veneti groups. During the Roman occupation of the island there was indeed an episode that involved the Veneti – "Venedoti" called by the commentator – that reveals how political conflicts were beyond control. The Venedoti are known to have taken part in the siege of London around 296 AD, where a group of them beheaded the Romans who had surrendered and threw their heads in the Nantgallum torrent: *Supervenerunt 80 Venedoti et, facto impetu, omnes decollaverunt super rivum*. Such a violent and disloyal action seems to be unjustified and invented, but in the river archaeologists found some skulls severed from the skeleton as evidence of the fact. The dynamics of the Venedoti's hatred are to be found in a feud between the allied Asclepiodotus, who was the Roman praetorian prefect, and the enemy Allectus, who was also Roman. What did Allectus do to deserve such hatred? Three years earlier he had murdered Carausio, head of the Menapii – a Belgian tribe that the Veneti befriended. Carausius had declared himself King of the Britons against Rome, so probably the Veneti and Britons shared hopes in the new king.

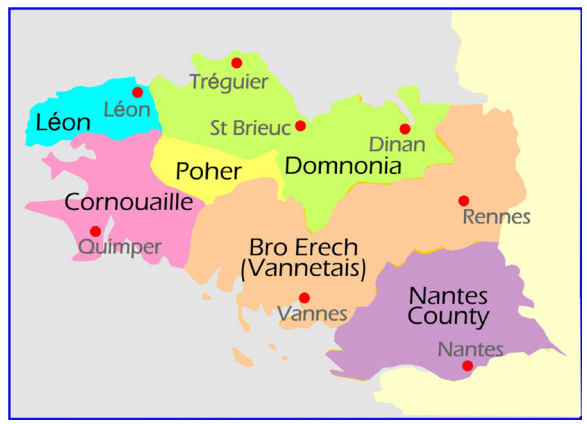
2) Around 600 AD it seems that the territory of the Venicones – under the name of *Maen Gwyngwn* – was mentioned in the poem *Y Gododdin*, despite at the time there was no longer any trace of the Venetic tribe. It is possible that the Venicones might have descended to the north of Wales under the guidance of King Cunedda and maybe together with some Votadini. The date of their arrival in Wales has never been clarified, although it seems to fall within 383 and 440. Before the arrival of the Venedoti, the north of Wales had been inhabited by the Celtic tribe of the Ordovices but, according to Tacitus, when they rebelled against Agricola the reaction was so harsh that the entire tribe was exterminated.

3) Davorin Trstenjak states that the Venedoti of *Venedotia* (Gwynedd) could be the ones mentioned in the 8th century by Einhard, a Frankish courtier of Charlemagne, when he wrote about how the Veneti of Britain returned to Gaul. The migration from Wales to Brittany was, thus, a sort of return of the Venetic people to the starting point of their Atlantic migration, that is, a return to their ancestors' land. In the first half of the 6th cent., after two previous minor migrations, King Waroch I settled in Vannetais with a massive migration both under pressure of the Saxons and perhaps due to the catastrophic eruption of the Ilopango (El Salvador), which led to famine and epidemics. In present-day Morbihan, the new dynasty established the Bro Waroch ('the country of Waroch'), which became Broërec later on, after they stole Vannes from the descendants of Caradog Freichfras, both a legendary knight of the Round Table and in Wales the King of Gwent (Caradoc ap Ynyr). It is worth noticing how the Venetic presence in Armorica has continued in toponyms to the present day.

Einhard



Tribes and cities: Veneti - Vannes (Darioritum), Coriosolitae - Corseul (Fanum Martis), Namnetes - Nantes (Condevicium), Riedones - Rennes (Condate), Osismi - Carhaix (Vorgium).



In the Middle Ages the division of Litavis (Brittany) initially consisted in only three reigns: Cornwall, Domnonia and Bro Erech. The Breton toponyms bear witness to the three distinct migratory waves (late 3rd cent.; early 5th cent.; early 6th cent.) and for sure the Welsh and Cornish names found in Brittany show the precise starting point of the migration. From the river Daron of Venedotia the Venedoti too returned to Darioritum, following the footsteps of Daron (the goddess of the sacred oak), then changing the city name in Gwened.

THE PICTS

... the cheeks marked with the needle
that streak with cerulean blue the appearances...
(Claudianus)

Pliny reports that a plant similar to plantain is called *glastum* in Gaul. Thanks to its root *glas*, the word *glastum* has the same meaning of the word *vitro* (used by previous authors to define the substance employed in body painting), that is "blue-green" like the typical colour of glass among the Romans. This also refers to the Gaelic name given to the plant: in Goidelic Irish *glas* means 'green'. There is a certain similarity between plantain and woad (*Isatis tinctoria*), whose use is supported by some archaeological finds.

Isatis tinctoria

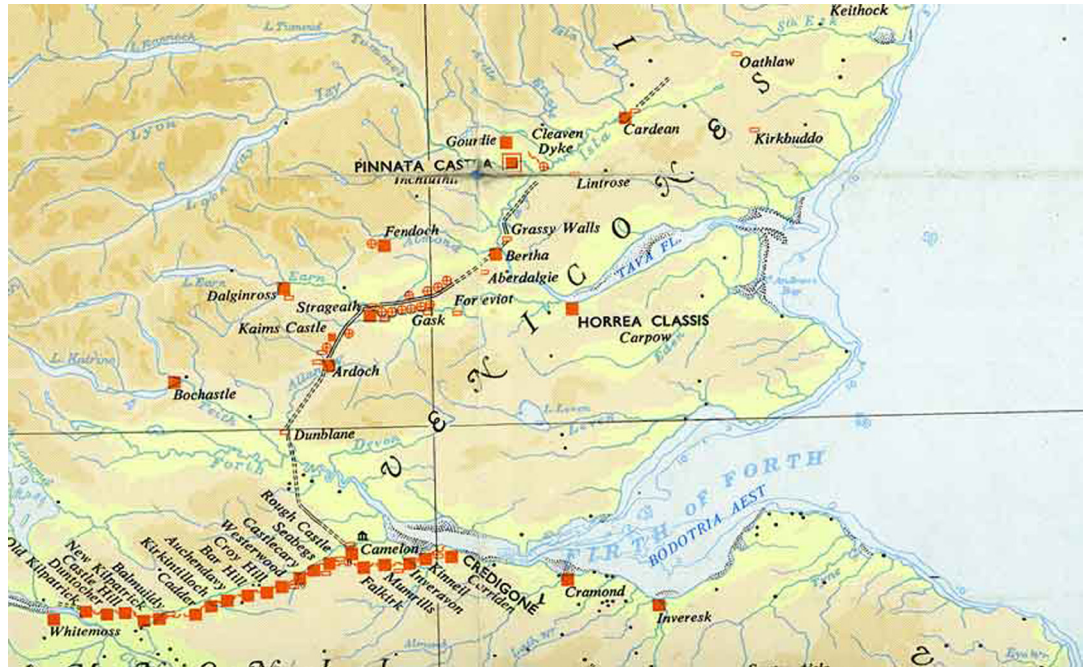
The Britons' wives and daughters-in-law, with their bodies painted, proceeded naked in a row during the religious ceremonies. (Pliny the Elder)

The Picts were the dominant group in "Eastern" Scotland until the 9th century. Their first quote dates back to 297 AD, when this group of tribes threatened the Roman borders (among which there were the Venedoti in the siege of London). Apparently the habit of body painting was not so present in Celtic Gaul. On the coins of the Coriosolites of Armorica (traders with Britain) there was, however, the face tattoo. Strabo also reported the use of tattoos among the Illyrians and the Thracians.

Blue was the ancient national colour of Ireland, before green. For the populations of the Middle East (i.e. Egyptians, Jews and Babylonians) the colour of the deities was light-blue. Coincidence if you may or not, it is also known that the Veneti's sacred colour was light-blue and that among the ancient Veneti there were processions of naked women, as is proven by the foils found in Vicenza. Can it have been the Venicones that painted themselves? Who knows if this question will ever be answered.

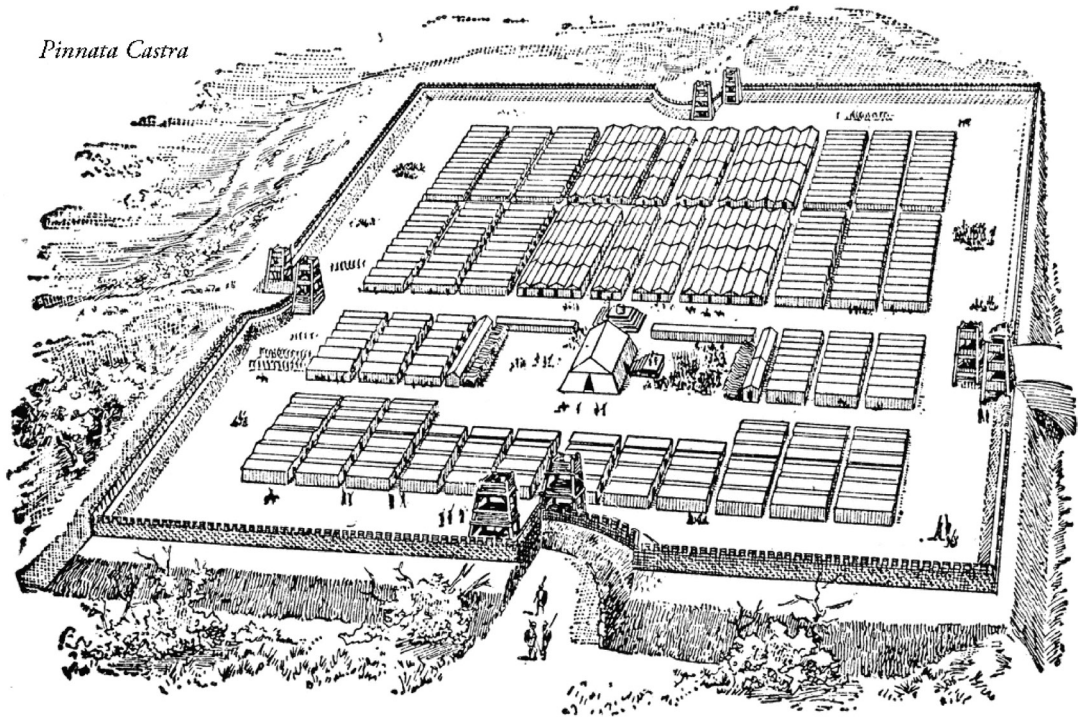
A Pict woman, 16th century engraving

THE FURTHERMOST LIMIT OF ROME



The Angus region in Eastern Scotland and the Antonine Wall (bottom left)

Angus was for the Venicones an expansion area from the Fife coast to the Scottish hinterland. The Romans arrived there 150 years after Julius Caesar had invaded Great Britain in 55 BC. Wanting to impress the Roman public opinion, Caesar lied declaring that he had conquered the whole isle and no other Roman general never achieved this target. Although the prime evidence of Roman campaigns, represented by marching camps, shows that the territory of Venicones was repeatedly targeted, it is not clear if some Venicones rebels took part in the battle of Mons Graupius together with the Caledonians against the Romans (around 83-84 AD), near the current city of Perth. The battle concluded the military campaign that Agricola had started in 79 AD. Gneo Giulio Agricola changed the art of war: while his predecessors had always fought during the summer, giving the enemy time to rearrange the troops, Agricola fought the enemy during the winter and simultaneously managed the conquered lands. According to Tacitus, Agricola's troops caused the enemies (who lost around 10,000 men, while the Romans only 360) to flee. The Roman legions thus often passed through Angus where lots of Roman forts were built and formidable encampments with thousands of soldiers were arranged. Today, the many new excavations in Western Scotland, to the north of Forth, are changing our understanding about the local settlements. Unfortunately in the East, we know very little about the Venicones, nor is there any clear connection between their name and the archaeological facts about settlements in Eastern Scotland. However, we cannot exclude that they had lived permanently in this area, which the Romans invaded many times to attack the Picts in the Eastern Highlands and to destroy their fleet.



A winter *castrum* was arranged by the Romans near Perth at Inchtuthill, on the banks of the River Tay, at the beginning of one of the main access roads to the Scottish Highlands. *Pinnata Castra* was its Latin name and it hosted 5,000 soldiers of the *XX Legio Valeria* Victrix, covering an area of more than 21 hectares. It was built in 83 AD during the offensives of the proconsul Agricola, who moved against the Caledonians from Angus. Since it was the northern-most point reached by the Romans, it had an emblematic meaning of great prestige and boldness. Over time there was first a Roman retreat and then a second advance around 140 AD under Antoninus Pius. This emperor restored a series of forts in the northeast between Forth and Tay (the defence line was at the northern border of Angus and divided the Lowlands from the Highlands) and he built the physical and administrative barrier of the Antonine Wall, which went from Forth to Clyde for 63 km. The Antonine Wall was a fortification with nineteen forts along the line formed by a terreplein and a palisade of wood; its structure was built by a land mass of four meters of height with a wide moat on the northern side and a military route on the southern side. The wall was left after twenty years, when in 164 AD the Roman legions receded to the South.

According to Ptolemaic geography, the Venicones certainly lived in the Angus area until 150 AD. During the age of the *Pinnata Castra*, the Romans thus had the Venicones in the area behind their front line. As far as the 3rd and 4th centuries are concerned, archaeologists cannot establish who lived in Angus owing to the total lack of written sources. In the absence of a verified name, they simply refer to them as the "local population". After Ptolemy's quote, no one talks about the Venicones and the texts of the Romans do not mention them during the following centuries. Had they all been killed? The legionaries had no reason to exterminate this local population. On the contrary, the Venicones supplied provisions to the Romans; they worked the land in order to produce wheat for them and stored it in underground warehouses during the winter. For this reason the capital of the Venicones was called Horreia, which derives from the Latin name *horreum*, meaning 'granary'. This city was marked on the Ptolemaic map of the 2nd cent. AD and also appears with the name *Poreo Classis* in the list of the Ravenna Cosmography (by anonymous, 7th century AD). The use of underground warehouses by the natives went hand in hand with the presence of the Roman garrison near the Antonine Wall: in fact, after the Roman retreat many warehouses fell into disuse. In the rearguards the Romans needed a cooperating community, who could provide logistic support and allow free access to the harbours. For the legionaries the decimation of this population meant starvation during the winter. Some treasures of money were found in this area and it means that a certain commercial prosperity arrived with the Roman interaction. Despite the military nature of the occupation, archaeologists believe that the Roman interaction with the local population was peaceful, at least for the first 100 years. On the contrary of the provinces south to Hadrian's Wall, in the Angus area the Romans did not establish their towns or rural villages, even if this region was densely-populated. Conversely, the local people did not adopt the Roman architecture, but continued to live in their characteristic "round houses" and to practice their religious customs. However, it is probable that the Romans demanded food and services as tributes. If the Romans did not kill the Venicones, why did this tribe disappear? It was not due to famines, considering the wise use of warehouses. Epidemics? They are unlikely in the northern weather. Did the other Picts exterminate a neutral tribe that provided the Romans only with farmers and not with soldiers? Like for the Romans, the death of farmers who controlled the supply of food in such a rigid climate was not advantageous for the Picts either.

In the Angus region there was a decline in the number of findings of settlements and artefacts. Is this a sign that the Venicones migrated southward? The most ancient name of this region is Circenn [*sir-sin*], from the son of King Cruithne, one of the forefathers of the Picts. At the beginning of the 3rd century Severus and Caracalla had led some punitive campaigns against the Maetae, but we do not know where these offensives exactly took place and which land the Maetae occupied. If, on the one hand, "Maetae" is a generic name that refers to a group of united tribes, on the other, there is a toponym that reveals a **dn* root: it seems that Dumyat (in Scottish *Dùn Mhèad*) – a little hill at the western extremity of the Ochil Hills in the Stirling area – derives its name from *Dun* ('stronghold') of the Maetae. Myot Hill, near Falkirk, could have marked the Maetae southern border.

Later on, the land of the Venicones came to be considered as the territory of the Verturiones, quoted by Ammianus Marcellinus at the end of the 4th century (an ethnonym thought to derive from Fortriu). This was the dominant opinion until some years ago, because everybody thought that Strathearn and part of the Perthire corresponded to the ancient kingdom of the Picts from Fortriu, the homeland of the Verturiones. Then, in a detailed study published in 2006, Alex Woolf from the University of St. Andrews (the oldest in Scotland,), confirmed that Fortriu and the Verturiones should be identified and moved to the North in Moray. This idea found large agreement and is the new orthodoxy.

Since the time of Ptolomey's first quote, had the Venicones been substituted by the Maetae in the Angus region? The Venicones differed from their neighbours in the type of burial: they cremated their dead and lowered them into tombs covered by stones. This was a very rare ritual in others parts of Great Britain and for this reason they might have been an independent population. The only other tribe that seems to resemble the Venicones was that of the Taexali owing to their habit of offering precious and decorated objects to the lakes, as well as enormous bracelets made of a copper and zinc (brass), an alloy which was characteristic of these two tribes. These jewels were worn on each arm, could weigh up to a kilo and half, and were probably forged between 43 and 200 AD. In 180, being caught between the threat of the Romans and of the Caledonians in the North, the Venicones may have sanctioned a coalition with the neighbouring tribes (the Taexali and the Vacomagi) and together they may have stipulated an agreement with the Romans during the governorship of Ulpius Marcellus. For this reason, no further mention about the Venicones as an isolated tribe is found; instead, they were considered as part of the federation of the Maetae. The name Maetae was used by Dio Cassius to indicate the coalition of the Southern Picts and could come either from the Greek *Meta* ('beyond'), or from the Latin *Mēta* ('border, extremity, bound'). In both cases there is a clear reference to a population who lived beyond the extreme border. The real seat of the Maetae, or Miathi, was indeed localised just beyond the Antonine Wall, in the west of the land classically assigned to the Venicones.

Thirty years later, the Maetae took advantage of Severus's illness and rebelled against the Romans. In 210 they began a revolution against the Roman Empire. The discovery of battlefields in the Fife dating back to Severus's age suggests that the revolution started from there and needed to be repressed. On this occasion Septimus Severus was the first Roman Emperor who went to Angus and had the *VI Legio Britannia* build a fortress there. The new fortress of Carpow, which could contain up to 3,000 men, was built between the navigable Tay and Earn rivers, next to the southern border of the Caledonians and near Horrea, the capital of the Venicones. After Severus's illness, his son Caracalla had to suppress the revolt and his dying father expressed his will of a real genocide:

"Let no one escape sheer destruction, no one our hands, not even the babe in the womb of the mother, if it be male; let it nevertheless not escape sheer destruction".

This was not, however, the reason for the disappearance of the Venicones ethnonym, because Caracalla's brutal methods had the opposite effect of causing the solidarity of the Caledonians, who took part in the war and won. With Caracalla's retreat and abandonment of the isle, the Roman ambition to conquer the whole isle disappeared. The Empire's border regressed to Hadrian's Wall and the North remained in the hands of the surviving peoples.

In 402-405 the Romans had to open a domestic front and to recall the legions in order to defend Northern Italy. Flavius Stilicho fought some battles against the invasion of the Visigoths and in the meantime the pressure of the Huns caused a wave of migration toward Europe and Asia, which created a threat along the Roman continental borders. These serious events forced the Romans to withdraw the garrison troops from Britain.

The island was abandoned a few years later (410 AD) and the Roman legions never returned there owing to the persistent pressure on the continental borders.

In 425 a series of events shows the plans of the Gododdin in the area of Stirling to preserve Britain's integrity. Prydyn is the name of "Alba", the land of the Picts, and the Maetae are quoted in the poem *Y Gododdin* with the name Prydheni, that is 'Britons' according to Roman nomenclature. It is thus possible that the Maetae were a fusion of those Venetic and local tribes that gave rise to the classically known Britons. After freeing themselves from Roman authority and under the brute pressure of the Gaelic kings, the Britons from Scotland, or "Picts", may have gone to Wales, where the progressive abandonment of the Roman forts had created a void of power. After the extermination of the Ordovices and the arrival of Irish pirates, in Northern Wales there was no enlargement of existing local tribes, but the appearance of a new tribe: the Venedoti. The presence of this people in Wales is documented by a gravestone that dates back to the period between 400 and 500 AD. This chronology is coherent with the legendary migration from central Scotland under the guide of King Cunedda. The Venedoti are mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100 - ca. 1155) as acting in conjunction with the Demetae of Southwest Wales. Alanus de Insulis, or Alain de Lille (ca. 1128 - 1202/1203), wrote that the name *Venedotia* applies to a province of Wales and *Venedotia* is repeatedly used by Giraldus Cambrensis (ca. 1146 - ca. 1223) to signify North Wales.

If the Venicones were "Veneti", we should expect to find a funerary ritual similar to the one used by the Veneti of Este in the Adriatic *Venetia*. So far no such proof has been found. Yet, there is something surprising about the previous ages: in Scotland the biggest concentration of urnfields was found in the land where the Venicones had settled. Thirty funeral urns were found in the Camp of Scotstarvit Hill (Fife) and twenty-two in Carphin House (Fife). In the district of Clackmannan, near Alloa (locality Mars Hill), the urns probably date back to the Middle and Late Bronze Age, in agreement with the finding of a couple of bracelets from the Late Bronze Age. The urnfields of Lawpark (St. Andrews) and Magdalene Bridge (between Edinburgh and Musselburg) instead date back to the Middle Bronze Age. The peak of the Urnfield Age probably ends in 900 BC.

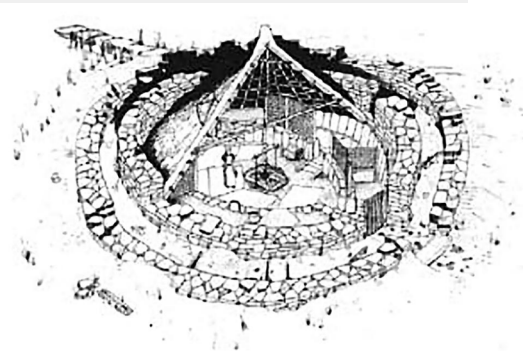
In Scotland the Bronze Age was divided as follows:

- Middle Bronze Age, 1500 - 1000 BC
- Late Bronze Age, 1000 - 700 BC

It does not coincide with the Polish division:

- III Period (Middle), 1350 - 1100 BC
- IV Period (Recent), 1100 - 900 BC
- V Period (Late), 900 - 700 BC

In Scotland the second part of the Middle Bronze Age coincides with the development of the Urnfield culture in Poland. How the Urnfield culture reached this remote northern location remains a mystery.



Urnfield thatched "round house"

Expansion of the Romans

56 BC - In Brittany **Julius Caesar** defeats the Venetic fleet
55 BC - Julius Caesar invades Britain
78 AD - In Northern Wales **Agricola** exterminates the Ordovices
83 or 84 AD - The Battle of Mons Graupius against the Romans led by Agricola
140 AD - **Antonius Pius** advance
150 AD - Ptolemy quotes the Venicones (in Scotland) and the Venicni (in Ireland)
180 AD - Agreement between the Romans and the Maetae (*coalition including Venicones*)
210 - 211 AD - Rebellion of the Maetae

Retreat of the Romans

290 - 297 AD - The Picts (*coalition of tribes including the Venicones*) attack the Romans
293 AD - The Roman Allectus kills **Carausio**, king of the Menapii's Belgic tribe who had declared himself Emperor of the Britons
296 AD - The Venedoti allied with Asclepiodotus, a Roman Praetorian prefect, against the usurper Allectus: London's siege and decapitations near the River Nantgallum (Walbrook)
367 AD - invasion of the South known as *Barbarian conspiracy*
402 - 405 AD - Flavius Stilicho fights against the Visigoths in Italy; threat of the Huns
407 - 410 AD - retreat of the Romans from Britain

Expansion of the Saxons from Germany

425 AD - **Vortigern** rules
440 - 442 AD - Migration of **Cunedda** from Manau (Scotland) to *Venedotia* (Gwynedd)
441 - 449 AD - Vortigern asks the Anglo-Saxons for help against (Cunedda's?) Picts who were attacking him on the northeast coast
442 - 533 AD - stele from *Venedotia* (Gwynedd) with the name of the "Venedoti"
450 - 517 AD - **Cadwallon Lawhir "Venedotorum"**, king of *Venedotia* (Gwynedd)
447 AD - Cadeyrn, king of Powys, dies in Rithergabail (Epsford, Kent) against the Saxons
491-496 AD - Battle of Mount Badon against the Saxons, Arthur's legendary victory
535 AD - Dust in air after the eruption of the Ilopango, with bread shortage until 539
5th-6th century AD - Migration of the Bretons to Brittany (France)
547 AD - The Angles establish the kingdom of Bernicia in the land of the Votadini

Expansion of the Gaels from Ireland

563 AD - **St. Columba** lands at the isle of Iona (Western Scotland)
586 AD - Aedan fights against the Picts in Circenn (district of Angus and Mearns)
590 - 596 AD - Prince **Arthur Mac Aedan** (Aedan's son) dies against the Maetae
596 AD - The equation Maetae = Phryden = Picts appears in the poem *Y Gododdin*
700 AD - St. Adomán quotes the Maetae
843 AD - The Scots, coming from Ireland, defeat the Picts.

369 AD ca.: to the North the border of the Votadini at the Antonine Wall. The Valentia's Province at the time of "Barbarian conspiracy".

According to the Welsh tradition, King Cunedda migrated to Wales from the Manau Gododdin (present-day Clackmannanshire in Scotland). King Cunedda, great founder of the Welsh kingdom of *Venedotia*, was the grandson of "Padarn Beisrudd ap Tegid". This name can be literally translated as: 'Scarlet robe Paternus son of Tegid'. In turn, Tegid could have been born at the beginning of the 4th cent. in Yr Hen Gogledd, the ancient north of the island. Somewhat creatively, some authors compare Tegid to the Latin *cognomen* Tacito, thus hypothesizing a possible Roman origin.

A traditional interpretation considers Padarn a Roman or Roman-British officer of high rank, who around 380 was appointed commander of the Votadini's troops by the usurper Magnus Massimo in the Scottish region of Clackmannanshire. Another theory maintains that he was a border tribal chief, to whom a Roman military rank was granted, as was customary in that period along the *limes* (border) of the entire Empire. The new fortification of Roman borders with the cooperation of tribes – like the Votadini – could in fact help men like Paternus advance their careers. Be as it may, his leading role in Scotland quite probably lasted until his death and he was then succeeded by his son Edern (Aeturnus in Latin), who was Cunedda's father.

The Manau Gododdin area – where Cunedda was presumably born – included Stirling, the "Gateway to the Highlands" which ensured domain over Scotland. The key is understanding which population controlled Stirling during Cunedda's kingdom, because the mass migration to the north of Wales started from Manau. It is logical to suppose that after the Roman retreat, many tribes decided to go to the south in order

to find more fertile lands and a better climate. Until that moment these tribes had been forced to exclusion and internment.

The Roman authors, however, do not call the area of Stirling with the name Gododdin; for them it was simply the land of the Venicones, inland from the western coast of the Firth of Forth. Gododdin [go'doðin] is the name of a kingdom of the Votadini that became independent with King Lot Luwddoc only around 470, that is, three decades after Cunedda's death. Before that, it seems that this land was controlled by the more southern city of Eburacum (York) in the land of the Brigantes. Lot reigned on Gododdin from the capital Trapain Law, near Haddington; even if it is told that his court was at Din Eityn (Castle of Edinburgh). His kingdom was known with the name Lothian in his honour. A pagan at least for the first part of his life, this historical figure inspired the Arthurian character "King Lot of Lothian", who married Morgause – Arthur's half-sister. At the time, weddings between neighbouring dynasties had the task to reinforce alliances against the threat posed by the Angles in the southwest of the land. In the Arthurian cycle, Mordred – son of Lot and Morgause – drives Queen Ginevra to adultery. With his brother Agravaine, famous for his malice and rudeness, he conspires to catch the secret relationship between his aunt Ginevra and Sir Lancelot. Mordred is "the traitor" who fights against King Arthur in the Battle of Camlann; he usurps the throne and becomes reconciled with the Saxons, the arch-enemies of Arthur and Cunedda's descendants. The leitmotiv of treason could also echo the actions of the leaders exiled from Gododdin, who, instead of fighting against the Angle, out of revenge and their desire for lands killed King Gwenddolau at Arthuret, because he was pagan.

King Lot's son represents the figure of the traitor because, unlike the populations who lived further north, the Votadini were mercenaries for the Romans. An exceptional silver treasure, comprising over one hundred pieces from different parts of the Empire, was found in the Votadini's capital at Trapain Law: it could have been a Roman payment for their alliance or for the mercenaries. The linguistic differences between the Votadini and the Picts were modest. The Venicones rather gave the Romans supplies – and not soldiers – and having settled beyond the Antonine Wall they were not subjugated to the Romans. The Antonine Wall kept its defensive and patrolling effectiveness for a short period: it was abandoned after only twenty years from its building, when in 164 the Roman legions retreated south of Hadrian's Wall.

In 368 Flavius Theodosius was sent to Britain with new troops by Emperor Valentinian to put an end to the "Great conspiracy", i.e., the invasion of the Roman province by the Barbarians. The Scots and the Picts invaded Manau and the Votadini's region. The year after Theodosius defeated the Barbarians, rebuilt Britain and divided it into five provinces: Britannia Prima, Britannia Secunda, Flavia Caesariensis, Maxima Caesariensis and the new province Valentia, whose name was dedicated to Emperor Valentinian I. Ammianus Marcellinus writes that in 367, during the Barbarian conspiracy, there were two tribes of Picts, the Dicalydones and the Verturiones alongside the warrior peoples of the Attacotts and the Scots, and all these tribes roamed the lands devastating them. Between 388 and 395 the Picts took advantage of the weakness of the Roman garrison to make continuous

raids. The Romans tried to reinforce their defences against the enemies from the North. Commenting on the structure of the wall, Gildas (504-570) wrote: "A wall of grass from sea to sea". During this period the Roman governor probably tried to rebuild the Antonine Wall, so that it could at least act as a barrier against the raids and thefts of livestock. As some suggest, a new way of patrolling the barriers (different from that used in the garrisons during the 2nd century) may have been undertaken by the peoples allied with the Romans south of the Antonine Wall. From 369 to 410 the Votadini were confined in the Valentia province, which – according to Ammianus Marcellinus – probably extended from Hadrian's Wall to the Antonine Wall, without passing over the barrier. The new province remained in the hands of the Romans for only forty years, because in 410 they definitively retreated from Britain. However, according to Frere, around 420 the Roman legionaries came back again for a last expedition.

How to explain then the "double" toponym Manau-Gododdin? It is not very clear if it was an independent kingdom with its own king or if Stirling's stronghold was easily conquered by the Votadini only "after" the departure of Cunedda and his people, so Nennius would have simply referred to this last new border in his *Historia Brittonum* of the 9th century. Was it simply the misunderstanding of a late historian like Nennius? Does the association of King Cunedda with the Votadini come from the mistaken or misleading re-elaboration of the Welsh monk? Was "Manau" (from the sea god Mannan) the ancient name of the area and "Gododdin" the new one? Or was Manau a stronghold of the Votadini in the North of Gododdin to defend the Roman interests?

Many are the weak points that spur a reconsideration of the weight and significance attributed to the doubtful association between King Cunedda and the Votadini as "king of their tribe":

1) a recent study by Martin Goldberg (from the National Museum of Scotland) affirms that there are good reasons to situate the Votadini further South, in Northumbria, and to remove them completely from Scotland. The new relocation of the Votadini in Northumbria is based on a rereading of Ptolemaic geography, without the contamination of other later literary works. This is a radical change in point of view that is possible to undertake

Willem Blaeu (1654) Atlas of Scotland based on the Geography of Ptolemy (ca. 140 AD). The Venicones on the bottom right, near the Taexali.

Cunedda's migration and the conquest of Northern and Southern Wales. Today, separate genetic groups can be found in areas of North and South Wales corresponding to the ancient kingdoms of Venedotia (Gwynedd) and Dyfed. There is a clear suggestion that both Welsh clusters related to Brittany.

despite the scarcity of proof available.

2) When archaeologists used to date the *castellieri* ('fortified boroughs') of Eastern Lothian to the beginning of the Iron Age, Trapain Law was considered the tribal capital of the Votadini and was believed to have been occupied until the Roman conquest. This point of view has been recently questioned by modern excavations, which suggest that it was occupied during the Late Bronze Age, while it was only scarcely active in the pre-Roman Iron Age. Evidence of limited activity does not agree with the idea of a tribal "capital"; it suggests rather an occupation negotiated with the Roman authorities, alongside the hosting of seasonal meetings or religious feasts.

The excavations suggest that the tribal capital of the Votadini was, instead, almost 70 km to the South near the fortified hill of Yeavering Bell, in Wooler (near Bamburgh). This site could agree with the central importance attributed by Alistair Moffat to the area near Kelso and Roxburgh.

3) The *Chronica Gallica* reports that the insular dominion of the Saxons from Northern Germany began in 441. Between 441 and 449 AD King Vortigern, native of *Powys* (Central Eastern Wales), asked the Saxons for help not against the Votadini but against the Picts, who invaded the north-eastern coast. Among these Picts, there were probably the Venicones led by Cunedda. The date of Cunedda's migration (around 440 AD) seems to slightly precede the arrival of the Saxons. It is, thus, possible that the Cunedda's warriors of Manau were among the Picts attacking Wales and against whom Vortigern unluckily asked the Anglo-Saxons for help.

4) We only have an approximate idea of which lands were part of the vast kingdom of *Powys*, which followed the Roman retreat at the beginning of the 5th century. Probably it spread to the East as far as the River Severn and to the South up to the Wye; in the northern part it expanded to the Irish Sea between Dee and Clwyd rivers. These lands seem to combine the territories of two Celtic tribes, the Cornovii and the Deceangli.

When the Romans left the isle, the "towns" of the eastern plains of *Powys* are said to have sought their new chief of government in the "man of the Llydaw". The Llydaw region was perhaps localised in the area of Snowdonia, which belonged to *Venedotia* (Gwynedd). In Snowdonia there was Llydaw Lake from which the wounded King Arthur departed towards Avalon. Llydaw is also the Welsh name of Britain. Who was that man, called to help the towns of *Powys*? Who reigned in Snowdonia after the Roman retreat? King Cunedda.

5) In the 6th-century poem *Y Gododdin* there is the following line: "The young son of Cian from *Maen Gwyngwn*". A linear interpretation could suggest that Cian, allied with the Votadini against the Angles, arrived from *Manau Veniconia*, meaning the land of the Venicones. As a matter of fact *Maen Gwyngwn* is probably read as [maɣn] + [*Gwən'gūn]. So *Manau Veniconia* could be the former name of the land Manau Gododdin or of one of its parts. Koch interprets *Maen Gwyngwn* as "the stone of the Venicones" and identifies the stone with the stele of Clackmannan (ten miles off Stirling).

The Welsh tradition of the Northmen considers a place called Calchuynid and in the *Book of Taliesin* – written by the most ancient Welsh poet (around 534-599) of whom some works have survived – Arthur is called Lord of Calchvyndd. In Latin *calx*, *calcis*, means both lime and base, and in toponyms in England this word originally meant limestone. In the language of the Bretons we find the word *cailc* and in Saxon the term *cealc* > '*chalk*' has the same meaning. If we distinguish *calch* and *vyndd*, we obtain a possible interpretation as Stone of the Vindi. Unlikely is, instead, the identification of Calchvyndd as the town of Kelso on the River Tweed (an interpretation questioned by Jackson).

6) Nennius's comment in the *Historia Brittonum* where Cunedda is linked to the Votadini is not totally reliable because it was written around four centuries later, so there is a lack of references in-between. It is a myth about the birth of the *Venedotia* dynasty, and as such it has to be considered with caution. Therefore, it is the weak base – which dates back to a very late literature – on which all the conjectures about the relationship between Cunedda and the Votadini are based. Indeed, many authors think that Nennius had invented his genealogy.

7) Padarn Beisrudd, a presumed commander of the Votadini with a British-Roman education, is a saint venerated by the Catholic Church. His genealogical ancestry refers to a certain Zara, Juda's son (in turn son of Jacob). It is known that sometimes hagiographic aims led to historical stretches, with important problems for the comprehension of historians. Nor should we forget that Nennius was a monk. The Votadini were certainly Christian, while the Venicones were probably not, as witnessed by their bards and maybe by the name Cunedda (today used as Kenneth), which is according to some a variation of Cunetag, that is, Dog of Dag. Dagda was the god of lightning like Zeus and Dagda was also the name of a legendary king of Donegal, son of the goddess Danu (Gaia) and Brigid's father. Thanks to the influence of the bards, the Breton royal family remained secretly pagan – in many cases even after having officially accepted Christianity. If the Venicones were pagan, we cannot exclude a falsification by Christian chroniclers to justify the genealogy of the dynasty of the kingdom of *Venedotia*, which could not have

pagan progenitors. To preserve the Church's reputation, it was more appropriate to have the dynasty derive from Votadini and from a saint like Paternus, i.e., Padarn Beisrudd. The Venedoti were still pagan during the reign of Maelgwn Hir "the Tall" (520 -547/549), a descendant of Cunedda. On the contrary Taneu (born 512 ca.), Lot's daughter and descendant of the Votadini, was keen on the teachings of the Christian missionaries.

Only in 710 the Picts converted to the Roman liturgy, when King Nechtan built a church *more Romanorum* ('in Roman style'). During King Cunedda's time therefore the Picts and the Venicones were pagan or, in other words, *gentiles* as the Apostle Paul would say. Ninian, the first Christian in Scotland, converted the southern Picts years before Columba did, between 360 and 432 AD. Nevertheless, since St. Ninian built his "white church" in Galloway, in Whithorn, his conversion seems to have been limited to the tribe of the Votadini, together with the Novantae and the Selgovae tribes in Southern Scotland.

8) There is no kinship between the dynasty of King Cunedda and the dynasty of Lot, king of the Votadini in Lothian, an adjacent kingdom on the western coast of the Firth of Forth (the name given to the deep inlet on the western coast of Scotland created by the estuary of the River Forth). In Medieval romances there is, instead, a relation of kinship between Arthur and Lot (his uncle) – and with Lot's son (Arthur's nephew) –, who however belong to the "bad relatives". Lot's dark genealogy connects him to the tribe of the Catuvellauni, more than to the Votadini. An inscription reminds us that the *civitas* of the Catuvellauni was involved in the rebuilding of Hadrian's Wall; moreover, the name Catuvellauni has survived in the Welsh name Cadwallon, given to two kings of *Venedotia*.

9) Tacitus tells us that the Votadini and the Damnonii (known also from Ptolemy's quote) occupied an area between Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. The Votadini would thus have been confined to the Roman province of Valentia, which bordered on the Antonine Wall and therefore ended before the Manau area. According to Alistair Moffat, in the north-east the Votadini bordered with the tribe of the Damnonii, who had settled just under the Antonine Wall. The border between them probably ran through the towns of Biggar and Edinburgh.

10) Even though the coupling of Votadini-Gododdin is consolidated among scholars, we cannot exclude that the name Manau Gododdin could come from *Urbs Guidi*, the town that Bede quotes as the current city of Stirling.

11) Where does the name *Venedotia* come from? If Cunedda had led the migration of the Votadini, *Venedotia* should not have received its name (now Gwynedd), but should have been called *Votadinia*; the residents of *Venedotia* would not have bequeathed the name of Venedoti, but the name of Votadini. If it is true that Cunedda gave "his" name to *Venedotia*, then the name Cunedda itself could be a Venetic name. A king could give his name to a kingdom, but rarely did he give it to all his subjects (i.e., the Venedoti). It is unlikely that *Venedotia* took its name from the inhabitants who lived in that area before Cunedda, because they were Irish and Cunedda massacred them. Finally, we must understand that both Venedoti and Brittany's Veneti were seafarers and, in a sense, they belonged to the same country because the homeland of Veneti is the sea, not the ground.

12) Cunedda may not be a proper name, but a nickname attributed to him by his soldiers (speakers of P-Celtic). This confuses the genealogy. This type of objection is made by those who want to deny the validity of every genealogy because of the frequent abuses of historiographers. Yet Cunedda already had a nickname: Cunedda "the Lion".

13) Cunedda drove away the Irish from Northern Wales and archaeological evidence confirms in the peninsula of Llyn the presence of the Irish settlement, probably colonies of the Uí Liatháin kingdom. Before Cunedda's arrival there are no quotes about the Venedoti in Wales: thus it was not an expansion of local Venedoti, but the arrival of the new tribe.

The provenance of the Venedoti, who in 296 (thus before Cunedda's migration) arrived in London near the River Gallobroc, is also unknown. The Venedoti were allied with the praetor Asclepiodotus against Allectus, who in 293 had killed the "King of the Britons" Carausius. Since Carausius was the tribal leader of the Menapii (Belgae), this could mean that there was an extended alliance between the Menapii and the Veneti to assure Britannia a redress. The Menapii, maybe identifiable with the Fir Bolg ancestors, colonised areas near the Venetic territories like Brittany, the Isle of Man (Insula Mona) and also Manau. Where did the Venedoti who arrived in London come from? We can suppose that they were the Venicones, who in that decade frequently raided areas beyond the Antonine Wall and even arrived south of London. Both the Menapii and the Picts had an efficient and fearsome fleet: the distance by sea between the Angus of the Venicones and the estuary of London is half of the circumnavigation from Wales to London. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that they may have come from some other part of Great Britain. It can be objected that the name Venicones is not the same as Venedoti; however, ca. 150 years after Ptolemy's Venicones quote, it is known that the name of a population can change according to the epoch, the language and the source of the quote.

14) It is reasonable to think that Gododdin and Manau Gododdin were two territories combined into one, like Mittel-European Austria-Hungary.

15) According to Adam Ardrey, Gododdin's garrisons had the reputation of being very slow during battles, inexperienced and under-equipped. So Gododdin was very vulnerable to the attacks of the Picts, who had efficient naval fleets that could raid up to the south of the island. In 398 the Picts attacked again and it seems that they sailed from the harbours of Fife and Tay, from the coast of Angus and from Moray Firth. In the decade before the Roman retreat it was not, therefore, easy for the Votadini to maintain control over the areas beyond the Antonine Wall: even if Manau Gododdin was on the mainland, the Firth of Forth Bay and River were navigable up to Stirling. Bede describes Stirling as *urbs Guidi* and this term was adopted by the Welsh to indicate the Firth of Forth with the ancient name *Merin Iodeo* 'the sea of Iudeu' .

16) Cunedda's power was in the cavalry, the typically Venetic unit, and the battle horses of *Venedotia* soon became the most fearsome local power. This provided the substratum for the legend of the Knights of the Round Table.

17) Manau could have been a "buffer state", a connection between the Roman Empire and its so-called Celtic enemies. Which community was the most suitable for this task if not an independent and "non-Celtic" people like the Veneti?

18) On the summit of the hill of Dumyat, in the Ochil Hills, there are some ruins of a fortress that overlooks the plain of Stirling. Scholars think that its name is a corrupted form of Dun Maetae, that is the Hill of the Meathi, the confederation of tribes which the Venicones – and not the Votadini – were part of.

19) Alistair Moffat thinks that the place where Cunedda gathered his people for the migration to Wales was present Clackmannanshire, near Ochil Hills. The town of Clackmannan, that is, *Clach na Manau* ('the Stone of Manau'), still exists today. The place falls in the settlement area of the Venicones. Slamannan, instead, is twenty miles south of Stirling and near Camelon (Falkirk district), which is associated with the legend of King Arthur.

20) Who took possession of Manau after Cunedda's departure? Cunedda's son, Tybion, stayed in Manau, but he did not establish a dynasty there. The situation is unclear but, according to some, the power was contended among Coel's sons. Instead, it seems that a certain Brychan of Manau (480-550 AD) took the power; his tribe is difficult to identify, but it did not belong to Cunedda's genealogy. He allied with the Gaels through the wedding of his daughter Llian with King Gabran. If Brychan came from the Picts, it is possible that Gabran's son, Aedàn Mac Gabran, became Prince of Forth (from the river near Stirling) thanks to his mother Llian and to the matrilineal succession used by the Picts, even if his father Gabran was Irish. In this area there were also the remaining tribes of the Maetae, that is, those quoted as Maetae by Adomnán in *Vita Columbae*, which are to be identified with the southern Picts of the 6th-7th centuries.

21) The poem *Y Gododdin* celebrates the heroes of Manau Gododdin who departed from Caereidyn, near Edinburgh, and died against the Angles. It was around the year 600 and at that time the Votadini were still in Manau Gododdin: what were they doing there? Shouldn't they have already migrated to Wales under Cunedda's guide?

22) Padarn is the name of a saint born "in Brittany" in the 6th century. He had noble lineage, being the son of Pedrwn and Gwen and grandson of Emyr Llydaw. He has the same name as King Cunedda's grandfather, that is, Padarn Beisrudd ap Tegid (beginning of the 4th century). Somehow the legends about the two saints were blended, because in the life of the Breton Padarn, patron saint of the local Veneti, the most celebrated episode is Arthur's attempt to steal his cape. This can be related to the biography of Padarn Beisrudd ap Tegid, also known as Paternus "with the scarlet robe" (one of the thirteen treasures of Britain). The meaning of the episode is clear: Arthur tried to steal the royal power represented by the "scarlet cape" of the Breton Bishop, who lived in Vannes.

23) Christianized Britons, fleeing the Saxon invasions of Britain, founded the early medieval kingdom of Bro Gwened (from 490 to around 635) in Brittany. The court was in the site of the former Venetic capital Darioritum and the city name was changed to Gwened. In this continuity of identity we can assume that the Briton migrants actually were the Venedoti of Wales. Indeed, in Wales Caradog Freichfras (born ca. 470 AD) was a legendary ancestor to the kings of Gwent and in Brittany, where he became a patron of St. Padarn, he is thought to have conquered the Vannetais.

24) Who brought the Arthurian tradition to Wales? The Veneti or the Votadini? In the Arthurian myth the most important element of the tribal diatribe between the Veneti and the Votadini is a magic word: Avalon! The western coasts frequented by the Veneti have many isles that could be Avalon, as corroborated by many legends; the same cannot be said of the eastern coasts inhabited by the Votadini where there are very few isles. In his book *Arthur and the Lost Kingdoms* Alistair Moffat – Chancellor of the University of St. Andrews and supporter of the thesis "the Votadini, King Arthur's tribe" – identified a way out from the problem in the islet at the convergence between the rivers Tweed and Teviot, and precisely in the town of Kelso which he considers as the most important centre for both the Votadini and Arthur. The pretext is the fact that this islet was sacred to the Celts; moreover its name Orchairt ('orchard') alludes to apples. The thesis however seems to lack reasonable grounds, since in both the Welsh and Scottish Arthurian legends there is no reference to an islet situated in a riverbed and easily reachable by ferry, instead of by a mysterious boat trip.

After all these considerations, what is the conclusion? A point in favour of the Votadini, according to Graham Phillips, are the archaeological finds in Northern Wales of ceramic materials typical of this tribe and which can be dated to the year 460. However, in absence of certainties, common sense would opt for the following hypothesis.

When Agricola invaded Eastern Scotland to fight against the Picts' fleet, the Roman legions succeeded in conquering the area known today as Fife, where the Venicones lived. It is reasonable to think that some Venicones escaped to the Highlands, but a part of the tribe surrendered and remained there. In 382 Cattelius Decianus was given authority on North Gododdin and in 384 the kingdom of Manau Gododdin was created in order to counter-attack the Picts. Nevertheless, when the Romans retreated to the south and the Quintilius dynasty came to an end, Cattelius Decianus' authority diminished and his successors moved their residence to Alt Clut on the western coast of Scotland (Strathclyde), where their dynasty organised some mixed marriages with Dál Riata. Although too narrow to be a bastion, the Antonine Wall continued to mark the border and acted as a toll point and a serious obstacle to raids by northern tribes.

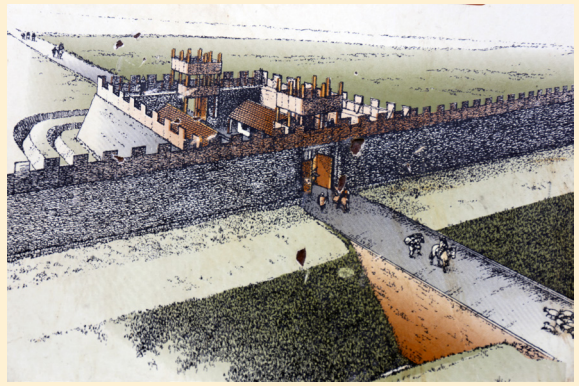
In that difficult moment, the Romans needed some allied tribes who could help protect the Antonine Wall. For some reason, the Votadini were designated for this task; they also had to control the subjugated Venicones in order to prevent them from engaging in aggressive behaviour. In this context the king of the Venicones became a *subregulus*, that is, a sub-king vassal of the Votadini. Consequently, if a local king (like Cunedda) is said to be a king of the Votadini, it is only a matter of interpreting a terminology that could be misleading: this king was just a king "under" the Votadini and essentially, at the same time, he was the king of a submissive tribe.

In other words Cunedda, leader of the Venicones, headed his people and, since he was "under" the dominion of the Votadini, Nennius was not wrong when he described his role, because Cunedda was operating under the Votadini's power. When the Roman legions abandoned the isle, the Votadini were no longer supported by the Romans and their task of controlling the borders became meaningless. Without the yoke of the Votadini, King Cunedda "the Lion" thus managed to guide his unruly Venicones to more friendly lands, a mission that had been impossible before.

The Antonine Wall today in the Camelon site

Camelot was King Arthur's royal residence and, according to the local tradition, it corresponded with the village of Camelon (district of Falkirk). The Gaelic Prince Arthur Mac Aedan is thought to have reused this ancient Roman fortress situated on the Antonine Wall. According to the Scottish scholar Adam Ardrey, the rough land of Camelon was the place of the last battle of Arthur Mac Aedan, whom the scholar believes to be the real King Arthur because died there in 594. Adam Ardery, in fact, interprets the name of the baleful battle of *Coraind*, drawn from the Irish Annals of Tigernach, as *Caer Aedan*, that is, fortress of Aedan. Ardrey's hypothesis contrasts, however, with the first quote about Camelot in 1170 by Chrétien de Troyes, who, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, places the golden age castle in Caerleon on the Usk, in the south of Wales and on the border with the southern part of Cunedda's kingdom.

Along the Antonine Wall, Camelon corresponds to a forward base of Agricola's campaigns placed in a strategic position fourteen miles from Stirling and on the bay of Firth of Forth, where there is a cove of the Forth River between the Manau-Gododdin border and the southern limit of the Venicones' land. An extraordinary find is a votive vase of Camelon whose style strikingly recalls that of the Urnfield culture: a line of fingerprints is, in fact, traced around the upper lip and a face is sketched on the vase's surface like on Pomeranian cinerary urns, which are among the most beautiful examples of the ancient Lusatian civilization.



Camelon Castle and Urnfield-style votive vase from Camelon (1st century AD)

Alba [ˈałəpə] is the Gaelic name of Scotland (*Albu* in ancient Gaelic) and its etymology, from the Greek *alphòs*, is maybe connected to the meaning of 'white land'. Albion was also the ancient name given to Britain by the Greeks and during the Early Middle Ages it was Latinized as *Albania* (from Latin *albus*). According to another interpretation, the word *Alba* would derive from the Irish 'land of the rising sun', in opposition to *Fodla* that means 'land of the sunset' to indicate Ireland. This hypothesis agrees with one of the most ancient emblems of Scotland: the rising sun that crosses the horizon. The word *Albu* was used by the Gaels to indicate the whole isle until the 9th-10th centuries and was then adopted to indicate only the kingdoms of the native Picts (Pictavia) and of the Scots who moved from Ireland (Dál Riata overkingdom). The Romans began to use the term *Scoti* to describe the Gaels in the Latin language from the 4th century onwards. It is evident that the Scots gave their name to all Scotland. The late "Kingdom of Alba" (900-1286) stretched from west to east in central Scotland, including Moray in the north and Lothian in the south, and it shared a common language and culture with Ireland.

Many scholars are studying the Arthurian toponyms of Scotland in order to demonstrate that Arthur was Scottish. However, there are hundreds of Arthurian toponyms all over Great Britain and not only in Scotland. It is clear, however, that the legend of King Arthur spread from Wales to Brittany and then to the continent both through the oral tradition and literary works. Arthur is commonly known as the King of the Britons and the experts consider the Britons as a Celtic population which settled in the British Isles. However the Celts of Britain were divided into many different tribes until the Roman Age. The term "Britons" does not refer to a single tribe, but is rather a broad term that refers to many allied tribes – as do the terms "Picts" and "Maetae". The question is: which tribe did Arthur belong to before he became the famous leader of the anti-Saxon alliance? Who was Arthur's tribe? Even if we accept the realistic hypothesis that Arthur's figure is the result of a mosaic of personalities that ranges within the space of one thousand years, we still have to analyse each tribe that could have originated the famous king.

THE MENAPII - This tribe had colonies on the Scottish, Irish and Welsh coasts and on the Isle of Man. They were a Belgic tribe contemporary to the ancient Veneti of Armorica and, like them, they were expert sailors and merchants. From 125 BC Gaul-Belgic coins were copious in the south-east of England, where new tribal centres like those in Gaul appeared. One of their leaders, the brave Carausius, first collaborated with the Romans to annihilate the threats of the Saxon fleet and then, in 286, usurped the power of the Roman Emperor Maximian, declaring himself the Emperor of Britain and of Northern Gaul. Carausius venerated the Belgic god of war, Camulos, a divinity

Carausius, Emperor of the Britons

Native tribes in Scotland and Great Britain

with a ram's head who brandished an invincible sword. Some authors have connected him to the town of Camulodunum (Colchester, in the south-east of the island), as the basis for the legendary royal palace of Camelot.

THE BRIGANTES - The tribe lived between the rivers Tyne and Humber, an area that at the time was more similar to Scotland than to the rest of England. Like other Atlantic tribes, they also had some bases in Ireland and may have had a common origin with the Brigantes of the Alps. The name Brigantes is the most similar to that of the Britons: the tribe took its name from the goddess Brigantia – a variation of Brigit – just like the Britons had borrowed their name from the goddess Brigit. A military gravestone found in the Roman fort of Mumerill quotes a certain son of Vindicis, belonging to the tribe of the Brigantes. After that their king Venutius – described by Tacitus as the bravest and most experienced commander of the Britons – fought against the Romans in 71, the Brigantes split into a pro-Roman and an anti-Roman faction. Even if Venutius was a shrewd warrior, he was not such a fascinating and important figure to compete with the legend of Arthur. Moreover, a clear migration of the Brigantes to Wales is unknown, even if they could have sought refuge in Wales under the pressure of the Angles and the Saxons. A subgroup of Brigantes, the tribe of the Carvetii, lived in Cumbria in Carlisle. Near this area the Battle of Arfderydd was fought in the year 573; it decreed the defeat of Gwenddolau, the pagan king who hosted Merlin at his court.

THE SARMATIANS - In 175 AD the Emperor Marcus Aurelius enlisted 8,000 Sarmatians from the regions of the Caspian Sea and 5,000 of them were sent to the northern border of Britain. Skilful knights of the steppe, the Sarmantians had snake-shaped banners and an almost mystic devotion for the sword (whose tribal ritual referred to the sword stuck in the ground). Elaborating on a previous hypothesis put forward by Joel Grisward, the two scholars C. Scott Littleton and Ann C. Thomas found a connection with the Arthurian legend in these elements.

THE ROMANS - The tribes of Ancient Rome were social units in which Roman citizens were subdivided and, at the beginning, they were identified according to their gentilitial status (*gens*). It seems that the Roman leader Lucius Artorius Castus was in the *Legio VI Victrix*, which took part in the construction of the Antonine Wall and in which the Sarmantians were enlisted. Although there is no proof that he commanded Sarmatian troops, according to Kemp Malone and Linda Malor he could be the historical figure on which King Arthur was modelled. As a member of the *gens* Astoria, he probably came from Southern Italy (Campania); yet this "Neapolitan Arthur" seems more linked with the legends of the Sarmatians than with local legends. Artorius Castus did not fight against the Saxons and lived in an early period (2nd century). As a matter of fact, Xavier Loriot believes that his epigraph attributes him as being "of Armenia" rather than "of Armorica".

THE GAELS - When analyzing the historical and cultural data about a "Gaelic King Arthur" it is necessary to split the historical aspect from the mythical aspect. After archaeologists from the University of Glasgow found some stone remains of the alleged Round Table in the Stirling Castle, historians focused on identifying King Arthur among the Scottish leaders. According to Adam Ardrey and Simon Andrew Stirling, the real Arthur was the Gaelic prince Artuir Mac Aedain (Artuir son of Aedain), who was contemporary of Myrddin (Merlin). His father Aedain Mac Gabrain came to the throne of Dál Riata and was crowned king of the Scots by St. Columba in 574. Although he was the first-born, Artuir never became king of Dál Riata. When Aedain apparently gave up the power to retire to a monastery, Artuir took on the role of commander (but the official king was still Aedain). After his father's death, his brother Eochaid Buide came to the throne. The dynasty's forefather, Fergus the Great, was buried in 503 on the Isle of Iona (western coast of Argyll), where Fergus himself had built a church that was to be the family's funeral chapel. Thus, Artuir Mac Aedain was also buried on Iona.

Several elements seem to hint at the most genuine Arthurian tradition. The Isle of Iona is presumably *Emain Ablach*, that is, "Emain of apples": it is one of the many islands that have been supposed to be the Isle of Avalon, where the fatally injured Arthur was brought. Just as the breath of nine maidens kindled the fire beneath the Cauldron, nine fair ladies wrapped in black capes welcomed King Arthur with Sir Bedivere to Avalon – nine just like the Muses of Apollo. The antiquity of this tradition concerning the nine supernatural women is proven by the oft-quoted statement of Pomponius Mela (ca. 45 AD).

Many aspects of the mythical King Arthur correspond with the life of Artuir Mac Aedain, who "reused" an ancient Roman fortress of the Antonine Wall known with the name of Camelon (believed to be the successive Camelot) and who died during a battle near the River Allan, also known with the name of Camallan (legendary Camlann). During the 6th century in that area there was an isle encircled by three rivers (Allan, Forth and Teith), corresponding to a settlement called "Invalone" which was not too far away from the place of Artuir's death. This isle could have inspired Avalon legend. Moreover, the most ancient references to King Arthur himself come from texts written in the Welsh language, the same language used during Artuir's time by Welsh-speaking people from where this historical Gaelic figure lived

The Round Table in Stirling Castle, the "Gateway to the Highlands"

and fought, that is, the Strathclyde region in the West Scotland.

On the other hand, however, Artuir Mac Aedain's aim was not to save the Britons from the Saxon's supremacy, as in King Arthur's legend. Instead, he had the hidden intent of stealing lands from the Picts, who had to be fought because they were pagan. The monastic community of Iona, founded in 563, scattered many monasteries all over Scotland. The real Arthur of the legend was, instead, pagan and friend of a wizard. Over time the Church tried to substitute him with an alternative Arthur that fit the Christian faith. Being its main element, the mythic background is essential to the Arthurian tradition; it cannot thus simply be removed with the excuse of scientifically purifying history of magical traces.

When we move from the historical facts to attributing a new value to Artuir Mac Aedain in order to identify him with the mythical "King of the Britons", several inconsistencies arise. First of all, Artuir Mac Aedain was not the King of the Britons, but of the Gaels, that is, the Irish settlers who founded the Kingdom of Dál Riata. In the text *Vita di Columba* Artuir Mac Aedain dies during the battle against the Maeatae, a coalition of Picts who probably invaded the ex-territories of the Venicones. The Irish Annals say that Artuir Mac Aedain died fighting against the Picts in the Angus region, the centre of the ex-settlement of the Venicones. Contrary to King Arthur of the legend, Artuir Mac Aedain did not die fighting the traitor Mordred of Lothian (who was not a Pict). Nor did he die fighting the Saxons, who were settling in the South. Geoffrey of Monmouth affirms that the Saxons were rewarded with the land between the River Humber and Scotland (that is, the Northumbria) in return for fighting against King Arthur. However, during the clashes between the Gaelic Kingdom of Dál Riata and Northumbria, Artuir did not fight against the Angles in Degsastan: his father Aedain did, and his brother died – not Artuir – during the battle.

Although it is true that Artuir Mac Aedain is the first historical figure to bear written proof of the name Arthur, there is a literary quote of Arthur that could be previous, even if it is very difficult to establish who it refers to and when this Arthur lived: the quote is found in the *Y Gododdin*, a collection of elegies to celebrate the Britons of Gododdin and their Welsh allies, who around 600 were defeated by the Angles during the Battle of Catraeth (maybe Catterick in North Yorkshire). Some scholars think that the poem was written in Southern Scotland after the battle, whereas others believe that it was written in Wales during the 9th or 10th century. In *Y Gododdin* there is a British warrior called Gwawrddur and his ability is compared to a certain Arthur: "though he was not Arthur". The meaning of this statement is that Gwawrddur was powerful, but not as powerful as Arthur. Some think that this line refers to Artuir Mac Aedain of Dál Riata, but it is plausible to think that it refers to the legendary Arthur of the Mount Badon Battle (between 491 and 496), where the Saxons were defeated and their advance was stopped on the borders of Wales. This success established his everlasting fame and generated more resonance than Artuir Mac Aedain's victories on the Picts. This "Gaelic Arthur" fought against the southern Picts, that is the Britons of Scotland, also called Phryden. The identification of the legendary Arthur with Artuir Mac Aedain it is absurd like electing a Saxon exterminator of Britons as the real King Arthur.

The Lady of the Lake with the Excalibur sword

THE VENICONES - Charles Thomas thinks that the Venicones spoke a Celtic language, even if their tribal name does not have a Celtic origin. To demonstrate that the Arthurian dynasty was not Gaelic, a fundamental element is the name of Arthur's father: *Pendragon*, which in P-Celtic means "head of dragon", that is, chief dragon. If it had been a Gaelic word, it would have been *Ceandragon* because in Gaelic head is [*ceann*], according to the Q-Celtic typology. It is thus possible that during the time of Artuir Mac Aedain, who died in 594, the Arthurian legend had already been circulating for at least a century. A big span of time separated, in fact, the Scottish candidate from the Welsh one, that is, Owain Dantgwyn (who ruled since 480). Nennius was the author who inaugurated the eternal myth of King Arthur as coming from North Wales.

On the other hand, as Simon Stirling pointed out, the most ancient references to the Matter of Britain indicate a northern origin, that is, a Scottish one. In 1120 Lambert, the canon of St. Omer in Brittany, wrote about "the palace of the warrior Arthur" as existing "in the land of the Picts" in Scotland. Lambert wrote in Latin, but he used the Gaelic name for Arthur, that is, Artuir. Beroul, whose novel in verses *Tristan* was written in 1200, declared that Arthur and the Round Table were situated in Stirling, on the River Forth. Geoffrey of Monmouth admitted that Arthur had fought during the battles around Dumbarton and Loch Lomond (Southern Highlands). Near Holyrood Park, Edinburgh is dominated by the hill of the so-called Throne of Arthur: *Arthur's Seat* is the location of a fort dating back two thousand years, situated on a dormant volcano with a height of 250 meters above sea level. In the version of the **Peredur's** story by Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval ou le conte du Graal*, the sword given to the Grail knight by his uncle the Fisher King could be "forged, quenched and repaired" only in a lake beyond the River Forth. It agrees with the finding of some bronze swords that were split, burnt and then thrown into Duddingston Lake, near Edinburgh: the connection with Excalibur, the sword thrown into the lake, is thus clear also before Sir Thomas Malory's later literature.

Arthur fought twelve battles and the majority is localised on the borders of present-day Scotland and near Manau, where the connection line between these battles seems to zigzag along the northern border of the Votadini and that of the Venicones. According to the topographic distribution of the battles, Andrew Breeze thinks that Arthur was a leader from the Glasgow area and he identifies the place of some battles: for example, the Battle of Glen near the River Glen (around Wooler, in Northumberland), the Battle of the

Caledonian Forest near the southern plateaus (around Beattock Summit), and the Battle of the River Douglas near Douglas Water, around Lanark. The toponyms identified by Breeze fall in a coast to coast area of Scotland, between the North line that joins Glasgow to Edinburgh and the South line from Carlisle to Newcastle. The idea of a leader from Glasgow is unlikely because in that age there were no important centres of power in that area and Glasgow was founded only in the 6th century by the Christian missionary St. Mungo. Maybe some of the battles quoted in Welsh literature were the echo of the raids made in the 7th century in Northumbria by the Welsh, who were allies with the Kingdom of Mercia, situated between Wales and Northumbria. It is known that in Wales, at the beginning of the 7th century, *Venedotia* was a kingdom independent from the Saxons and that Great Britain was longitudinally divided in two parts with the western part yet controlled by the Britons. Southern Scotland was the theatre of battles to stop the advance of the Saxons and Angles, especially at the end of the 5th century. In 590 a confederation of Briton kings from south-western Scotland (Kingdom of Rheged) – fighting in the North – tried to chase away King Hussa and the Angles from Bernicia (present-day Northumberland and Durham). The Briton opposition to Bernicia, which reduced it to a narrow coast, remained strong until the end of the century, as witnessed by the archaeological lack of Angle graves on the island's interior. In the late 6th century the Kingdom of Bernicia was also attacked by a King of Rheged – the over-king Urien –, whose name is mentioned, alongside his son Owain, in Welsh poems and genealogies, thereby entering the Arthurian legend.

The core of the Arthurian tradition is present in Scotland and overlaps with the later expansion areas of the Irish Gaels. How can we explain this enigma? Since the first Scottish references to the Arthurian cycle mention areas situated in or around the Venicones settlement in Scotland, we can suppose that the Arthurian tradition was transmitted by the Venicones. Recently, archaeologists from the University of Glasgow found the stone remains of King Arthur's alleged Round Table near the Stirling Castle (adjacent to the area of the Venicones). Both the 16th century Scottish poet Sir David Lindsay and, in 1478,William of Worcester said that King Arthur kept the Round Table in the Stirling Castle. The current circle probably dates back to the beginning of the 17th century, but it is possible that these quotes referred to a more ancient version of the construction, which is difficult to collocate in time: only further analyses will confirm if it dates back to the Iron Age or the Middle Ages. The Arthurian myth was so strong and rooted in Stirling and in Angus that it may have culturally influenced Artuir Mac Aedain's Gaelic dynasty "only at a later time". If it is so, how did the Gaelic dynasty come into contact with the previous Arthurian tradition? It is worth remembering that the Gaels of Manau had royal status through the matrilineal line of King Brychan and that Artuir Mac Aedain's matrilineal lineage takes us right to the heart of the land of the Venicones in middle-eastern Scotland: Angus, the land of rolling hills and wide valleys that stretches to the border with the Highlands. Artuir Mac Aedain's sister was most probably born in Angus at Balloch of Gowrie (Bealach Gabráin) at the foot of Barry Hill; instead his wife, sister-in-law of Muirgein/Morgana, is associated to the fort "of glass" of Barry Hill and to the close village of Meigle, which was in ancient times the important religious

and royal centre of Migdele. We also know that two battles were fought near the River Isla and one of these at Badandun Hill (Artuir Mac Aedain's last battle). Finally, the cultural influence is mutual: the local tradition of Angus may have influenced Artuir Mac Aedain, but we cannot exclude that some elements of the "royal" life of the Gaelic king contributed to reinforce the local Arthurian legend.

Very important clue, it seems that Chrétien de Troyes drew inspiration for his Parsifal from a figure associated with the *Mabinogion* and known as **Peredur**, son of Efrawg. We must emphasise that the Welsh knight **Peredur** was *dux Venedotorum,* from Latin 'chief of Venedoti'. Besides, in *Vita Merlini* – written by Geoffrey of Monmouth – there is a **Peredur** "King of *Venedotia*" who ruled also Albany, i.e., Scotland, and took part in a battle that could be the Battle of Arderydd. According to the *Y Gododdin*, **Peredur** survived the epic battle but then died in a battle against the Angles at Catraeth (Catterick).

To conclude the argument that the Veneti may have been "Arthur's tribe", we can mention the surprising correspondence between the locations of the Arthurian myth and Venetic names both in Scotland, with the Venicones, and in the two areas reached by the migration of King Cunedda, that is Gwent – in Southern Wales – and *Venedotia* – in Northern Wales. As for the fort of Stirling (possessed by the rulers of Scotland) it is meaningful that the ancient name of the castle was Snowdon, like in *Venedotia* the beautiful Snowdonia, which is Arthur's kingdom. *Venedotia* is known as the land of the *Venedoti* and is connected with the dynasty of King Arthur, so the association between the Veneti and the Arthurian myth is clear. The spread of the Arthurian legend could be connected to the Atlantic migratory flows of the Veneti, the only tribe present in "all" the areas classically linked with the Arthurian myth.

Beyond the efforts of many authors whose historical research remains inconclusive, and misrepresented by local preconceptions, it is fundamental to remain anchored to the essence of the spiritual message of the Arthurian myth, as in the following points:

- the devotion for the horse and consequently the cult of the cavalry; indeed, King Cunedda's strength was the cavalry, a typically Venetic unit that probably originated the well-known Knights of the Round Table.
- The socio-political idea of the *Primus Inter pares*, as expressed in the Round Table, finds correspondence among the ancient Veneti *senatus* in the *Pilpotis* figure and then during the Serenissima in the figure of the Doge, who was equal to the other Venetian patricians.
- The cult of Apollo, where Mapono is the god of the springs, as Apono is in Abano.
- Brigit, goddess of the "land of Britain", similar to Reitia goddess of the land of Veneti.
- The ritual of the sword thrown in the waters like in Excalibur and the Lady of the Lake, which backstory is provide in *Merlin* section of *Prose Lancelot* or in the *Post-Vulgate Cycle.*
- The swans which pulled to his beloved the boat of Sir Bedivere or King Arthur's ship Prydwen, that led him to the Otherworld, remember the Venetic Solar Boat.
- In *Diu Krone* the Grail King declares that he and his folk are dead. The cauldron, considered the prototype of the Grail retrieved in the Otherworld by King Arthur, is traceable in the Venetic bucket, that is, the omnipresent sacred *situla* of the Veneti, from which wine was poured during rituals and celebrations.

If it is true that around 491 King Arthur routed the Saxons at Mount Badon, why did the Venedoti move from Wales to Brittany in the following decades – during an age of military supremacy – to found a new kingdom in their original homeland? According to the Irish Annals (Annals of Ulster and Annals of Inisfallen), in 535 a cloud darkened the sun and reached the northern hemisphere, where it remained for about two years causing famine from 536 to 539. In 537 the lack of bread was worsened by the curse of Vad Velen, a pestilence that affected the kingdom of the alleged nephew of King Arthur, Maelgwn of *Venedotia*, who died of the disease in 547. It was the cloud generated by the eruption of the Ilopango volcano (El Salvador) in 535 which had this devastating global effects. Even if Kenneth Jackson sets the first colonies in Brittany to a period earlier than the eruption, the change from the "Armorican dynasty" of Eusebio to the "Breton dynasty" was inaugurated ca. in 535 by King Waroch I, who reigned in the region of the Benetis (Vannes) until 550.

THE VOTADINI - During the 1st century the Romans quote the Votadini, who from 138 to 162 AD were submitted to the direct Roman military supremacy in the region between Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. When the Romans retreated beyond Hadrian's Wall, the Votadini created a buffer state and were rewarded with alliances and gifts by the Romans without being under their yoke. A real kingdom of the Votadini was created only after the Roman retreat from the isle and its name was Kingdom of Gododdin, anticipated by the "sub-kingdom of Manau Gododdin and area of Forth" under Catellius Decianus. Gododdin became independent with King Lot Luwddoc after King Mor's death (around 470) and then had an uncertain dynastic history. The capital was conquered during the 7th century by the Angles of Northumbria, who put an end to its independence.

The Votadini, according to Alistair Moffat, and the Veneti, in my opinion, seem to be the most probable "Arthurian tribe" candidates. Even if the Votadini took an active part in the Arthurian legend, they had the role of "villains". Mordred in 15th-century literature is the offspring of Arthur's inadvertent incest with Morgause, the king's estranged half-sister and wife of Lot. He was the protagonist of the duel with Arthur during the Battle of Camlann: the Votadini did not create a liberating hero, but a traitor. Mordred's action as described in the legend is maybe compatible with historical reality, since some Votadini integrated and collaborated with the Angles of Northumbria. Before surrendering, some heirs of the Votadini, known as *Guotodin*, fought in the area of Gododdin against the Angles of Bernicia and Deira in the Battle of Catraeth. Koch notes that in the most ancient version of *Y Gododdin* (the poem about Catraeth) this big battle is not described as a defeat and the Anglo-Saxons are not mentioned.

In the Welsh Triads, Medrawd united with the Saxons because he might secure the kingdom to himself, against Arthur.

Was Arthur a Roman-Breton or a native? If for the identification of the tribe that put forward the Arthurian myth it came down to the Votadini or to the Veneti, for the identification of King Arthur as a historical king it seems to come down to either the Roman Ambrosius and Owain Ddanwyn, the Venedotos of North Wales. The first detailed account about King Arthur's life is found in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1138. In this work there are many elements that are antecedent to its writing and which are not compatible with the Roman-Imperial culture, but are nonetheless perfectly in line with the tradition of the natives. Geoffrey drew inspiration both from ancient local divinities – which provided the substratum for Morgan, Guinevere, and the knights Kay and Bedivere – and from the Welsh legends, in particular *The Spoils of Annwfn* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In *Culhwch ac Olwen* Arthur's company sail to Ireland aboard the ship Prydwen to obtain the cauldron which, like that in *The Spoils of Annwfn*, would quickly cook meat for a brave man but never for a coward. In *De Excidio Britanniae* (6th century) Gildas was the first to quote the Battle of Mount Badon, famous for the defeat of the Saxons, and he attributed the victory to Ambrosius Aurelianus, one of the few Romans who survived in Great Britain after the retreat of the legionaries. Gildas seems to give us a reliable testimony because he writes about events close to his time. Two centuries later, the monk Bede again wrote that Ambrosius Aurelianus won the battle against the Saxons, after that Vortigern invited them to the island "to fight the Picts". In Southern Wales the hill *Mynydd Baedan*, near Bridgend, was conquered by Cunedda and the battle of Mount Badon later could have taken place there. *Mynydd* is the Welsh word for the Latin *mons* (mountain) and *baedan* is close to *baedd*, boar and to *baeddu*, beat/punch (Welsh mutation from d to dd, where dd = eth or ð).

According to Dario Giansanti, the name of the leader Arthur would have been fictitiously introduced by Nennius (9th century) who borrowed some elements from Welsh mythological legends such as *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where Arthur is a tribe leader – probably of the Silures – in Gwent (South Wales). The Silures were a branch of the Veneti tribe and established themselves in South Wales in the early 2nd century BC. Venta Silurum (today Caerwent) was the capital of the Silures. A residence for King Caradog at Caerwent would seem quite natural but, in light of Barber & Pykitt's theory, it seems possible that he inherited the town at the death of his King Arthur in the Battle of Camlann and that Caerwent was Camelot, with its Church of St. Stephen. Some features of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which is one of the most ancient Arthurian texts to have come down to us, seem to date it back to the 11th century, after Nennius therefore, even if the oral tradition could have existed earlier. In the *Book of Taliesin*, a tale included in *The Treasures of Annwfn* tells about one of Arthur's journeys to the Otherworld to find a magic cauldron. The *Welsh Triads* likewise tell about Arthur's mythological adventures. Nennius would have thus intentionally substituted the Gilda's historical figure of Ambrosius with the mythical Arthur who was well-known in the Welsh pre-Christian tradition. If Gildas is closer to Arthur in time, Nennius is closer to him in space, because he lived in Bangor, in the *Venedotia.*

But it is not clear why Nennius – disciple of the bishop of Bangor – may have created such a misunderstanding that would have tormented scholars for centuries. Christian chroniclers would often forge texts to glorify and highlight saints and Christian kings, but the Welsh King Arthur was surely pagan: during Nennius's time the myth had not yet been Christianized and no one considered the Grail as the chalice of Christ's Blood.

Even Ambrosius is an ambiguous figure. It is highly improbable that a Roman leader, in an important and decisive battle, fought the Saxons 100 years after the Roman retreat from the island, more than three generations later. The Gaul-Romans had already plunged into chaos in 455, when the *magister militum* Aetius was killed. Moreover, in Wales the process of demilitarization had already begun years before the Roman legions abandoned the island in 407-410. As a matter of fact, of the forty-one Roman forts present during Flavianus' reign (69-96 AD) only ten were present in Antonine's period (138-192 AD). In Ambrosius' genealogy we find that he is Constantine's son and brother of Uthyr Pendragon, who had a son named Arthur. Arthur is thus not one of Ambrosius' nicknames, but his nephew's name. The alleged forefather of Ambrosius, Constantine III, was a Roman general who in Britain had usurped the title of Western Roman Emperor. However he was captured and killed in 411; so, had Ambrosius been his son, he would have had to be about 100 years old during the battle of Mount Badon in 496. In the middle there were thus his parents who, according to Gildas, wore the *toga praetexta* of high magistrates, a white toga hemmed with a broad purple stripe. That Ambrosius' parents held such high institutional positions, at a time when the locals had reclaimed administrative control, is also very unlikely. In 409 Zosimo reminds us that the natives had expelled the Roman civil administration and had encouraged the population to live their lives independently from Roman laws. Moreover, Ambrosius' parents were relatives of a general, like Constantine, sentenced to death by Rome.

The Penmachno Inscribed Stone (North Wales)

Ambrosius and Owain Ddanwyn were contemporaries and lived in the same Welsh area. Maybe we are approaching the truth about the place and time of the historical personage of Arthur… We know that Owain Ddanwyn's son lived in Din Arth, "the Fortress of the Bear" in North Wales. In the precious text *Culhwch ac Olwen* there is Amlawdd Wledig, who married Gwen, Cunedda's daughter. Sir Amlawdd should be Owain Ddanwyn's grandfather, so Owain was part of Cunedda's dynasty. The Welsh court in *Culhwch ac Olwen* was in the territory that Cunedda occupied in South Wales, in Gwent. Known as Caerleon, or as Camelot in Arthurian literature, the court could correspond to the Roman age town-market called Venta Silurum (or Caerwent). During the age of the decisive battle against the Saxons, the kingdom founded by Cunedda was the only one that could oppose the Saxons. According to tradition, Cadwallon Lawhir "King of the Venedoti" reigned during the Battle of Mont Badon. Moreover, in *Venedotia* (Gwynedd) the

stele of Penmachno, which bears the inscription *Vendotis*, also dates back to the late 5th century AD (the site was traditionally known as "The grave of the Ardudwy men"). Since there was a Kingdom of Venedoti capable of protecting itself, it is doubtful that the Welsh kings would have given the role of commander to a Roman ruler rather than to Cadwallon's brother Owain Ddanwyn. Where was the kingdom of Ambrosius Aurelianus, that is, of Emrys Wledig? Ambrosius was allegedly in power in 479, but during that year the Welsh king was Einion Yrth ap Cunedda (470-500), Owain Ddanwyn's father in Welsh kings' genealogy, who in the legend corresponds to Arthur's father Uther Pendragon.

According to Nennius, Ambrosius Aurelianus took the kingdom from Vortigen, who died during the siege of Ambrosius in Ganarew (in 459). Vortigen maybe belonged to the Powys dynasty in Central-Eastern Wales and some scholars think that in 435 Vortigen was not succeeded by Ambrosius, but by Vortigen's son: Cadeyrn Fendigaid. The Kingdom of Powys was adjacent to and in competition with that of Cunedda in Wales. Everything becomes clear if we identify the Picts who threatened Vortigern's kingdom and forced him to ask the Saxons for help with the descents of the Picts/Venicones, guided by King Cunedda to Wales. These facts took place from 441 to 449 AD, when Vortigern "*Tyrannus Superbus*" invited the Anglo-Saxons to help him against the Picts, who were attacking the eastern coast. It must be said that these attacks were not the raids of the Votadini, not at all mentioned in the chronicles of those years, but those of the Picts. Moreover, Cunedda's descent and expansion occurred in the same decade. The decisive battle between the Saxons and the Picts probably took place in Vindolanda in 452, with a bloody defeat of the Picts. After less than fifty years, near Mont Baond, the Saxons were defeated by King Arthur during a very important and legendary battle. In conclusion, there is a linear and simple logic in these events: the Powys dynasty – worried about the invasion of the Venicones from the North – asked the Saxons for help, until the Venicones/Venedoti defeated the Saxons thanks to their military leader Arthur.

In the most ancient Medieval Welsh texts, including the *Mabinogion*, the word Prydain or Prydein refers to the northern-most part of the island, namely Scotland, beyond the rivers Forth and Clyde. Prydyn is the first name given to the Picts by the ancient Welsh sources, and is thus synonymous with the Gaelic Cruithni and the Greek Pretani. The Venicones and Venedoti may have had a common language. Many scholars agree that Pictish is a branch of the Briton language: the Pictish language was an insular Celtic, similar to the P-Celtic of Briton languages such as Welsh, Cornish, Cumbric and Breton. If we accept the equivalence between the Picts (Prydyn) and the Britons (Prydain), then in the genealogy of Cunedda's ancestors the line of "Briton kings" from Tegid of Britannia to the forefather Afallach of Britannia is meaningful. Traditionally, Arthur was also the King of the Britons and continues to be their king in folklore.

May it be true that Gildas denied this dynasty to glorify Ambrosius? Did the wise monk have some hidden reasons to falsify history? Gildas seems a sincere chronicler and even disapproves the clergy when he talks about the vice of drinking spread among Briton prelates. Yet, the early Christian chroniclers had already understood the great power of writing to control the population, in an age when texts were still rare. In the *Historia*, the

first part of *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Gildas does not follow a chronological order; instead, like many other texts of late ancient Christian literature, Gildas seeks a causal relationship between Briton morality and God's answer: "God shall consider the distress and pain suffered by the Britons and offer remedy only if Britons obey God". St. Gildas, who was born in 516 on the shores of the River Clyde (Dumbarton) and died in Brittany in 570, was contemporary of that Maelgwn who reigned in *Venedotia* (Gwynedd) from 520 to 547. Maelgwn "the Dragon of the isle", from Cunedda's dynasty, did not possess the moral qualities that Gildas preached in the *Historia*: he was considered wicked because pagan and, even worse, he declared himself Christian and then renounced his faith.

A legend about St. Padarn talks about *Mailcunus rex Guenedotae's* bad reputation:

Maelgwn once heard that St. Padarn had a large store of gold, and so devised a plan to trick him out of it. He sent messengers to the bishop with sacks of moss and pebbles. Pretending this was the content of the treasure they asked Padarn to retain it in safe keeping while Maelgwn and his armies went off to war. Months later, the messengers returned to collect their sacks but, of course, found them filled with grass and stones. Padarn was dragged before the king and accused of theft. Upon refusing to replace the treasure, the bishop was forced to undergo a trial by ordeal. Both he and his accusers were obliged to plunge their arms into a pot of boiling water. After a period of healing time, their wounds were examined. The messengers' arms were still raw and painful, but Padarn's burns were completely healed. The saint was declared innocent and Maelgwn was forced to admit his plot. As penance, the King gave Padarn a grant of land.

The wicked personality led Maelgwn (*Maglocunus* in Latin) to kill his uncle Owain Ddanwyn, that is, King Arthur. According to David Sims' reconstruction, Maelgwn could be the real Mordred of the Arthurian legend: Arthur's incestuous son and also his killer. If Maelgwn wanted to kill Arthur, it means that Owain had assumed such a reputation and power to threaten the throne in his nephew's mind. Even Owain's son, Cynlas Goch (the Red) or *Cuneglassus* in Latin, was denounced by Gildas as one of the five tyrants: "You bear, you rider and ruler of many, and guider of the chariot which is the receptacle of the bear. You contempter of God and vilifier of his order". How could Gildas glorify the cruel line of Cunedda's dynasty in his works? If it is true that Cunedda arrived in Wales with the Picts/Venicones, for Gildas they were only a cruel foreign nation. Conversely Ambrosius, a man with firm moral values, is rewarded with victory by God.

Nennius exactly does not believe that Ambrosius was the winner of Mount Badon, but he considers him as a "great king among the Briton kings". Maybe both chroniclers took the Roman figure of Riothamus as the starting point for the creation of Ambrosius' figure. According to Jordanes, in the second part of the 5th century (in the same age, therefore), Riothamus was King of the Britons (the last time he is mentioned in the sources he was in the French town of Avallon, in Burgundy). The Romans were officially Christian since the Empire of Constantine (306-337). In Britain, the diffusion of the Roman Church had probably led missionaries to an idealization of the last Roman commanders of the isle as bearers of moral and civil values, who fought against paganism in Britain with their new religion. After the Roman retreat in 410 AD, but not beyond 418, there were some Roman representatives – imperial officials – known as *Comes Britanniarum*, who belonged to

the time when two different factions were born: a pagan faction pro-independence of the Britons and a Christian faction pro-empire. Probably this latter faction was led by Ambrosius. The pro-empire faction was active at least until 470, when there is still mention of a contingent that fought in the name of the Emperor Anthemius. Which was Owain Ddanwyn's faction? Was he Christian or pagan? Maybe he was devout to the goddess, since in the process of Christianization Arthur is connected to the Virgin.

Finally, we need to consider the "interpretation" of Gildas' text. According to Adam Ardery, the text may not say that Ambrosius was the winner in Badon. Gildas first quotes Ambrosius and then he writes: "Thereafter the victory goes to our fellow countrymen, but today it goes to their enemies". The meaning could be that some time passed between Ambrosius' age and the victory, so there is no clear indication of the winner's identity.

In their book *King Arthur: The True Story* (1992), Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman identified the historical figure of King Arthur in Owain Ddanwyn, son of Einion Yrth "the Impetuous", that is, of Uter Pendragon. The argument derives from the interpretation of some passages of the text *De Excidio Britanniae* by Gildas. Maelgwn of *Venedotia*, son of Cadwallon Lawhir, did not succeed to his father, but to Owain Ddanwyn, becoming his rival for the reign. So maybe he killed Owain (in the legend Maelgwn blurs into the Votadin Mordred, killer of his uncle). Later he was also in contrast with Owain's son, Cuneglassus. *Dyrnwyn*, a magic sword with powers similar to those of the Excalibur, appears in the feats of the antagonist of Maelgwn son. When somebody drew it, *Dyrnwyn* "white hilt" flared up and if it was held by a worthy man it could help him in his efforts. On the contrary, if an unworthy or selfish man drew the sword, the flames could wrap him up and burn him.

Graham Phillips develops the idea of the migration of the Votadini to Wales, but is clearly mistaken when he argues that Owain Ddanwyn was King of the Votadini. His brother Cadwallon Lawhir "Venedotorum" ruled during the time of Mount Badon's battle and was King of the Venedoti. It is thus impossible that one brother was king of the Venedoti and the other of the Votadini: both were Venedoti kings.

Arthur with the shield of the Virgin

ARTHURIAN CHRONOLOGY

71 AD - 1170 AD

Roman Age

71 AD - Venutius fights against the Romans
2nd cent. AD - Lucius Artorius Castus, high officer in the *VI legio Victrix* and then *dux*
286 AD - Carausius, King of the Menapii and "Emperor of the Britons"
383 AD - Magnus Maximus, general of the troops in Britain, declares himself Emperor
470 AD - Riothamus, King of the Britons, defeated in Burgundy

Saxon Age

441 - 449 AD - King Vortigern asks the Anglo-Saxons for help to fight the Picts
452 AD - The Saxons defeat the Picts (probably in Vindolanda)
459 AD - Vortigern dies during the siege of Ambrosius Aurelianus in Ganarew
479 AD - The Roman Ambrosius Aurelianus takes control over the surviving Britons
480 AD - The kingdom of Rhôs of Owain Ddanwyn (supposedly King Arthur) begins
490 - 517 AD - Overwhelming victory of the Britons against the Saxons at Mount Badon
500 - 517 AD - Cadwallon Lawhir *venedotorum* expels the Irish from the Isle of Anglesey
525 - 540 AD - In *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* Gildas quotes Ambrosius Aurelianus
510 - 537 AD - Kingdom of Muircertach Mac Erca in Donegal (Ireland)
550 - 600 AD - Oral composition of the poem *Y Gododdin* that quotes "the famous Arthur" and celebrates the expedition of Manau Gododdin's Votadini and their Welsh allies against the Angles
6th century AD - Arthnou, Prince of Tintagel, in Cornwall
645 AD - Arthrwys ap Meurig, King of Gwent and Morgannwg

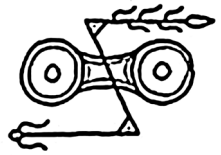
Gaelic Age

563 AD - Foundation of the monastic order of Iona
574 AD - Aedain mac Gabrain is crowned King of the Scots by St. Columba
594 - 596 AD - Artuir Mac Aedain dies in Angus against the southern Picts

Literary Age

599 AD - The Welsh Bard Taliesin dies
830 AD - Nennius quotes Arthur in *Historia Brittorum*
10th century AD - The *Book of Taliesin* is compiled with Arthur's adventures in *The Spoils of Annwn*
1100 AD - The poem *Culhwch ac Olwen* talks about the Arthurian adventures
1100 - 1150 AD - probable dating of the "oral" stories of *Mabinogion*
1136 AD - Geoffrey of Monmouth quotes Arthur in *Historia Regum Britanniae*
1170 AD - Chrétien de Troyes writes *Erec et Enide*

THE ENIGMAS OF THE PICTS

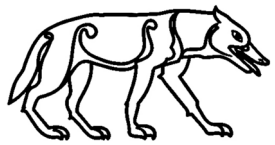


Among the Picts, polarity was described by the clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation – inside two opposing circles – of the Triskelion, that is the triple spiral that resembles a three-armed swastika. This Double-Disc, linked by a bridge, is the most recurrent and enigmatic symbol of Pictish stones. It is probably a cosmological sign of the universal polarity that manifests itself in its two opposites: the rising sun and sunset, the two sides of the coin and the two handles of the cauldron. In the middle, a kind of lightning branching off at its extremes breaks the symmetry and recalls the Solar Boat if the two circles are vertical.

The Caduceus – represented by one or two twisted snakes on a Z rod – is another symbol that the Picts used to carve in stones:

Legend has it that the messenger of the gods, Hermes (Mercury) received a staff from Apollo. When he reached Arcadia, he saw two snakes in front of him that were devouring each other; he then threw the staff between them and they became reconciled.

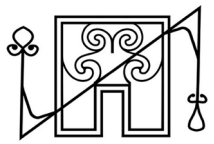
It is a very ancient symbol of the occult anatomy of the human body and we can find it among the Assyro-Babylonians, during Ancient and Alexandrine Egypt (linked to Hermes Trismegistus) and in India, carved in stones.



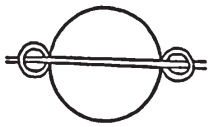
The Picts engraved wild animals such as wolves, wild boars, salmon and birds. Among the mythical creatures, they had a preference for sea horses, dragons and centaurs, as well as gryphons. The gryphons lived near the Hyperboreans and were the guardians of the gold of the Riphean Mountains, which, according to Aristotle, were located in Scythia and, according to Ptolemy, were the watershed between the Baltic Sea and the *Póntos Áxeinos* (Black Sea). In some versions of the Promethean myth, it is not the eagle but the gryphon that devours the liver of the Titan, who is chained to the rock for having stolen the fire from the gods.

Double-Disc with Z rod and a comb on the side, Pictish stone from Angus (Meigles)

Gryphon (winged lion with eagle head)



The Aberlemno Stone, located in the Scottish area of Angus, most likely represents the epic Battle of Nechtansmere (684 AD), when the Picts defeated the Anglo-Saxons and expelled them from their territories. Worthy of notice is the cavalry in battle and, in addition to the Z rod up in the stone, a two-ring-sided hollow circle: it is a cauldron that, according to Simon Stirling, could be a prototype of the Grail.



The *Book of Taliesin,* indeed, narrates Arthur's voyage to a supernatural world in search of a magic cauldron. The *Book of Taliesin* bears the name of the British bard Taliesin (ca. 534-599), who was the first poet to write using the Welsh language. However, according to the scholars, it was written in the 10th century. In the *Hanes Taliesin* the "twice born" bard obtains his prophetic and poetic gifts through the virtue of three drops of liquor from a boiling caldron, the caldron of Inspiration and Science, prepared by the enchantress Ceridwen.

Aberlemno Stone (Angus)

Among the stones from Angus in the Museum of Meigle – the ancient religious and royal centre Migdele – there is a mermaid, whose symmetric tail and the circle designed by the crossing of her arms jointly recall the symbol of Reitia's Key.

The medieval legend of the Melusine narrates that Elynas, King of the Picts, came across a beautiful lady called Pressyne while he was hunting in a forest, in the reign of Alba (Scotland). Elynas immediately fell in love with her and tried to persuade her to marry him at any cost: Pressyne agreed, but only on the promise that the King would not enter her chamber when she was giving birth to or bathing her children. The new queen gave birth to female triplets: Melusine, Melior and Palatyne. One day the King broke his promise and entered his spouse's chamber, so Pressyne left the kingdom and escaped with her daughters to the isle of Avalon. On their fifteenth birthday Melusine, the eldest, asked her mother why they had been taken to Avalon and came to know about the violation of the promise by their father. To take revenge on their father, Melusine and her sisters locked him in a mountain. But the mother Pressyne got angry at them for their disrespect toward the father and condemned Melusine to take the form of a serpent from the waist down every Saturday.

Eochaid Mac Eirc was the last king of the ***Fir Bolg***. In Irish mythology, the Fir Bolg were among the first inhabitants of Ireland: legend has it that the ancestors of the Fir Bolg were the original inhabitants of Scythia, a land that is located north of the Black Sea, between Asia and Europe. According to recent historical theories, the Fir Bolg are simply the mythological transposition of those tribes who populated Ireland before the Gaels; therefore, they were probably a pre-Celtic population. In the south-east of the island, among these tribes, there was a colony of Belgae from Gaul, the Menapii, who were mentioned by Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD as "Manapi". The Menapii were coeval of the ancient Veneti of Brittany and, going back in time, they date at least to the 3rd century BC. A totally similar colonizing feat to that of the Menapii could have also happened in Donegal thanks to the Venicni, who – according to the comments on the *Irish Annals* – are a possible overseas settlement of the Veneti people from Armorica. These comments clearly explain that: "*Probably the Veneti of Armorica, being skilled navigators, could have been among the founders of the Fir Bolg's Irish colonies*". Naturally, the historical transposition of mythical elements is not an easy operation and could be subjected to inconsistencies, but the commentators of the *Irish Annals* were deeply experienced historians. There is nothing strange about assuming a Venetic colonization on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean: if we broaden our horizons, we can notice that even the Greeks had many maritime settlements, as well as the Phoenicians, the Romans and almost every other most important ancient population. The ancient Veneti were skilled merchants and moved across half of Europe; their name and fame preceded them everywhere.

The ***Tuatha Dé Danann*** defeated the Fir Bolg and, according to medieval sources, populated Ireland before the Gaels. Like the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann originated from a group of descendants of Nemed, the commander who – after the Flood – led his men from Scythia to Ireland. Because of epidemics and enemy threats, most of the Nemedans were forced to leave the island and move to the remote boreal islands. The name *Tuatha* is reminiscent of the Venetic *teu.ta* ('people'), which has no parallel in Latin. The Tuatha Dé Danann were the people of *Danu*, a mother deity, whose name contains the root **dn* of every Balto-Venetic hydronym. Danu is also the name of a primordial Indian deity that in the *Rig Veda* is identified as the mother of Vṛtra, the demoniac snake killed by Indra. The Indian Danavas were a branch of the Asura which, under the leadership of Bali, rebelled against the gods, but got defeated by the Devas. In the *Rig Veda*, almost every demon defeated by the Devas is a Davanas, thrown into the depths of the ocean and there relegated by Indra. As the Tuatha Dé Dannan are the sons of the goddess Danu, the Danavas in Vedic mythology are likewise a race descending from the sons of Danu, who in turn is the daughter of Daksha (homonym of the Irish god Dagda). The Vedic Danu is connected with the "waters of heavens" and she is probably associated with the formless, primordial waters that existed prior to creation. Moreover, Danaoi (Δαναοί) was a frequent name used in the *Iliad* to indicate the besiegers of Troy, and Danae, impregnated by Zeus under a golden rain, was the mother of Perseus – the

founder of Mycenae. It is interesting to observe that the mythology of the Tuatha Dé Danann included another important Venetic female divinity, the goddess Brighid, and also the swans are closely related to them.

The Tuatha Dé Danann, who are "the luminous gods of Ireland", received four magical objects as a gift:
- the Stone of Destiny "Lia Fail", a stone with supernatural powers
- the Sword of Nuada, also called Claíomh Solais or "Sword of Light "
- the Spear of Lugh, the god that had the epithet of *Teutates* "tribe's man" or "man of the North" and, in the Romanized form, that of *Mercurius Artaios* "protector of the bear"
- Dagda's Cauldron, also known as "the resurrection cauldron", is a prototype of the Grail: it is a large pot that never became empty or left anyone hungry. When the cauldron was not used, it served as a case for the Spear of Lugh, which always dripped blood.

The royal residence of Dagda, their divine progenitor, was located north in Inishowen (the land of the future reign of Ailech). The fort would have been constructed by the will of King Dagda to protect the tomb of his son Aeah, placed in the middle of the building. There, the descendants of King Dagda – i.e. Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht, Mac Greine and their wives – were crowned to rule Ireland. In the 2nd century AD, Ptolemy correctly placed this residence in one of his maps of the West. That palace has been described as: "red-coloured, carved and decorated with gold and bronze, and so full of gems that day and night it was just as sparkling". Much later, around 320 AD, a residence was built in this place by the famous architect Frigrind, who travelling around Scotland kidnapped Ailech, the daughter of a king in Alba. It became the palace of the kings of Ulster and then of the dynasty of the kings of Ireland until the 4th century AD.

Arthur to Ireland, or to the Welsh island of Bardsey, aboard Prydwen to get the Cauldron

The ruins of the circular walls of Grianan of Aileach are still visible at the entry of the Inishowen Peninsula and near the village of Burt, in County Donegal – 8 km north-west of Derry. The stone wall, belonging to the Iron Age, is a wide ring, five metres high and four metres thick at the bottom, with an inner diameter of 24 metres; a passage brings into the construction, which looks like an amphitheatre. The place is enchanting: from the hill you can dominate the landscape with the superb bays of Lough Foyle and Swilly.

The new king of the Clan Conaill eats the beef of the white mare, sacrificed after the king's sexual intercourse with her.

In the *Topographia Hiberaniae* 'The Topography of Ireland' (1188), Giraldus Cambrensis describes a royal inauguration ritual of the Clan Conaill, in which the king has sexual intercourse with a white mare that is then sacrificed and boiled. While the king takes a bath in the mare broth, he and the popular assembly eat its meat and, at the end, the king drinks the broth. During the pharaonic ritual of the Vedic Ashvamedha, a white stallion was immolated though suffocation (which induced the erection of its penis) and the queen stretched herself out naked between the stallion's legs, put its phallus in-between her thighs and inserted it.

According to the Ptolemaic map (ca. 150 AD), in ancient Donegal near the *Boreum Promontorium* we can find the *Ouenniknioi*, i.e. the **Venicni**. There is enough evidence to link the Veneti of Brittany to the Venicni; thus even the Venicones of Scotland, who have the same name, would also be linked to the Veneti. The Venicni did not become extinct: their descendants were the **Windukatii**, who were settled in Donegal, in the Dunfanaghy area, situated on Sheephaven Bay at the border of the Ros Guill Peninsula. The name Dunfanaghy is supposedly an Anglicization of the Irish name Dun Fionnachaidh 'fort of the fair field', but Alan Mac an Bhaird claims that it derives from the immemorial Irish form of Dunon Windukation, that is, 'fort of the Windukatii'.

The Windukatii are the precursors of the Clan Duach of Goll and Irgoo Reign and belong to the descendants of the **Conaill Clan**, who were ethnically Cruithni and therefore Britons, even if they were fully Gaelicised in the late Roman Age. Besides the propagandistic inventions of an ancient text that extols the following invaders of Donegal, there is no evidence that the regents of the local reign had any blood ties with Niall of the Nine Hostages and with the Ui Neil dynasty. In the 5th century **Conall Gulban**, an eminent figure of the Clan Conaill and probably a descendant of the Venicni, is instead the fully-proven ancestor of the Cruithni people of Donegal.

When we group the various Venetic tribes with a "similar name" under a single cultural

root, the immediate reaction is to invoke fate, even more so if we want to put both the Venetic names and the Arthurian tradition into the same cauldron. It is fair to demand proof or, at least, evaluate the probabilities of truth of that comparison. It is certainly true that the Veneti's Brittany is famous for its abundance of Arthurian legends, as much as the Venedoti's Wales or the Venicones' Scotland are. On the other hand, hundreds of toponyms and references to King Arthur are however scattered in Northern and Western England. What about Ireland? In Ireland there are 32 counties, including those of Northern Ireland, but only in one of these the presence of another tribe with a Venetic name is attested. Donegal, the county of the singer Enya, was the homeland of the Venicni: a name definitely similar to that of the Venicones in Scotland, as well as to the ethnonym *Venetkens* in the *Venetia*. Are these names a mere coincidence without any real connection? For Arthur to pop up in Donegal, there is only one probability in 32 counties: we might not have scientific evidence yet, but if we demonstrate the existence of a connection between Donegal and Arthur, then the space of casualty shrinks to 3%.

In his book *King Arthur in the Pseudo-Historical Tradition*, English historian Dane Pestano sets out to corroborate the existence of a common inspiration between the legend of King Arthur and the autobiographies of **Muircertach Mac Erca**, who in the 6th century settled in An Grianán, in the north of Ireland. Ailech (from the ancient Irish *aile* meaning 'enclosure' or 'fence') was his reign in present-day County Donegal, including the Inishowen Peninsula. A story with surprising similarities to the one of the Welsh King Arthur unravels, therefore, also in Ireland. While some still believe that the Votadini tribe brought the Arthurian tradition to Wales, for sure no Votadin ever landed in Donegal. The biography of Mac Erca and the structure of his legend mirror the ones of the Welsh King Arthur. Briefly, the evidence of the parallelism can be disentangled as follows:

- the name Mac Erca contains the **rtko* root of bear (*Arktos* in Greek); in Welsh Erth/Arth means 'bear' too
- Mac Erca ruled from 510/513 to 534/537 and both kings could have lived in the same period of time because, according to the Welsh Annals, King Arthur should have died in 537
- the triple death of Mac Erca recalls the sleeping status of Arthur in Avalon island
- being the first Christian king of Ireland, he was an unequalled model of perfect royalty and justice
- in the Irish Annals, Mac Erca generated his son Constantine, an Arthurian figure
- in a late Scottish version, Arthur marries the daughter of the king of the Francs, as Mac Erca does
- his wife Duinsech has the same initial root of Arthur's queen mother, Guinevere (Gwynifer in modern Welsh), whereas the first wife of Mac Erca was named Badon, as the mount of the battle where Arthur defeated the Saxons
- Mac Erca had a powerful army and defeated the same civilizations defeated by Arthur
- in the manuscript *Didot-Perceval*, Arthur's last battle took place in Ireland
- it is quite sure that Mac Erca was the leader that the Irish considered their Arthur.

CLAN MAC TAVISH

Chief Steven MacTavish of Dunardry

Colin Mael Maith (ca. 1100 AD) was the father of Tavis, who many sources consider the progenitor and founder of the noble Clan MacTavish in the Highlands. This is not completely correct, however, since the MacTavishes consider themselves much older than the traditional tales of the Scottish County of Argyllshire that were promulgated by the ancient bards of the Highlands. This archaic origin is traceable in the Irish Annals and in the ancient act *Ceart Ui Neill*, drawn up in Donegal. The Clan MacTavish derives from a branch (Windukatii) of the Cenél Conaill, a clan that descended from the king of Ros Guill and Irguill – two peninsulas of Donegal. Tír Conaill (Anglicized as Tyrconnell) was the name of the kingdom that covered a good part of present-day County Donegal. The historian and cartographer Ptolemy included the Venicni tribe in contemporary Donegal, under the name of *Ouenniknoi*, and the lineage is traceable in various texts, such as the *Irish Annuals of Ulster* and the *Four Masters*. Following the myths of Ulster, the genealogy of the *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells* – drawn up in the 17th century – tracks back the origin of Colin Mael Maith, as "common" founder of the Campbell and MacTavish Clans, to the legendary King Arthur. The genealogies of the Clans, sometimes faked, are very complex and this *Genealogie of the Campbells* has been proven wrong by historical records; despite this, the link with Arthur legend can be right.

The cruxes of the MacTavish line can be summed up in this way: 1) from the Venicni tribe probably descends the Clan Conaill of Conall Gulban, the founder of the kingdom of Tír Conaill, who died in 464. 2) Cenél nDuach branch (Windukatii). 3)The royal members of Ros Guill and Irguill descend from Donegal's royal family. 4) The Clan MacTavish settled in Western Scotland since ca. 893 AD. The members of the Clan are mentioned in the Argyll as landowners of the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata – located in Western Scotland and with Dunadd as capital. Fraser wrote that the Gaelic name Reti, and later on Riata, stands for 'a horse on the run', while the inhabitants of Dál Riata are often called Scots – *Scotti* in Latin – a term that seems to originally mean 'invaders'. In the 5th century, the kingdom of the Scots started to conquer County Argyll from Ireland, even if it seems that the Scots were present on the island during the late Roman dominance.

Nowadays, the various Scottish clans are starting to make their own genetic classification based on the haplogroups, *marker-genes* that are handed down from father to son with absolute regularity. Theoretically speaking, all the members of a Clan can inherit the same haplogroup of their leader. From a genetic point of view, similarities between Ireland and Scotland would be transmitted in the Clan MacTavish by the predominance of some modalities of the R1b haplogroup, the Western European one (not typically Venetic such as the R1a). The Clan MacTavish could provide an example of how similar the Donegal stock (R1b - STR43) and the Pictish stock (R1b - STR47) were.

DONEGAL (IRELAND)
Fir Bolg

Venicni 2nd century
(Ouenniknoi according to Ptolemy)

Vennienii
(from Roman sources)

Conall Gulban, king of Tir Connell
(Cenél Conaill)

Windukatii
Cenél nDuach branch of the Cenél Conaill
(from Irish Annals)

Kings of Guill and Irguill

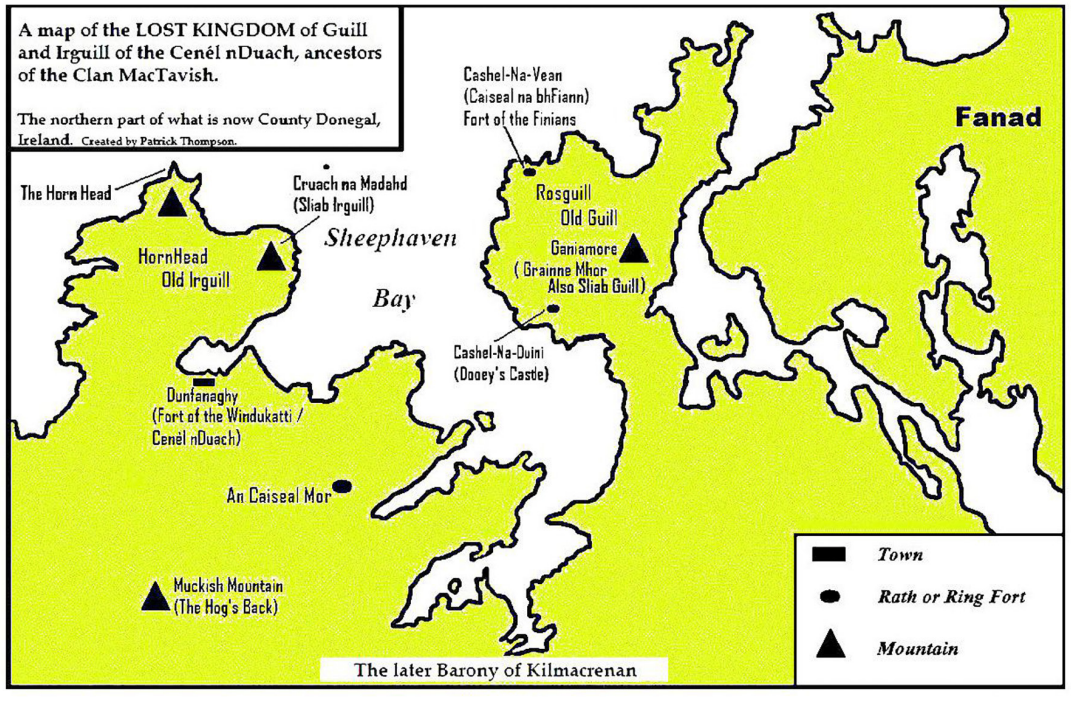
Fergus Cennfoda

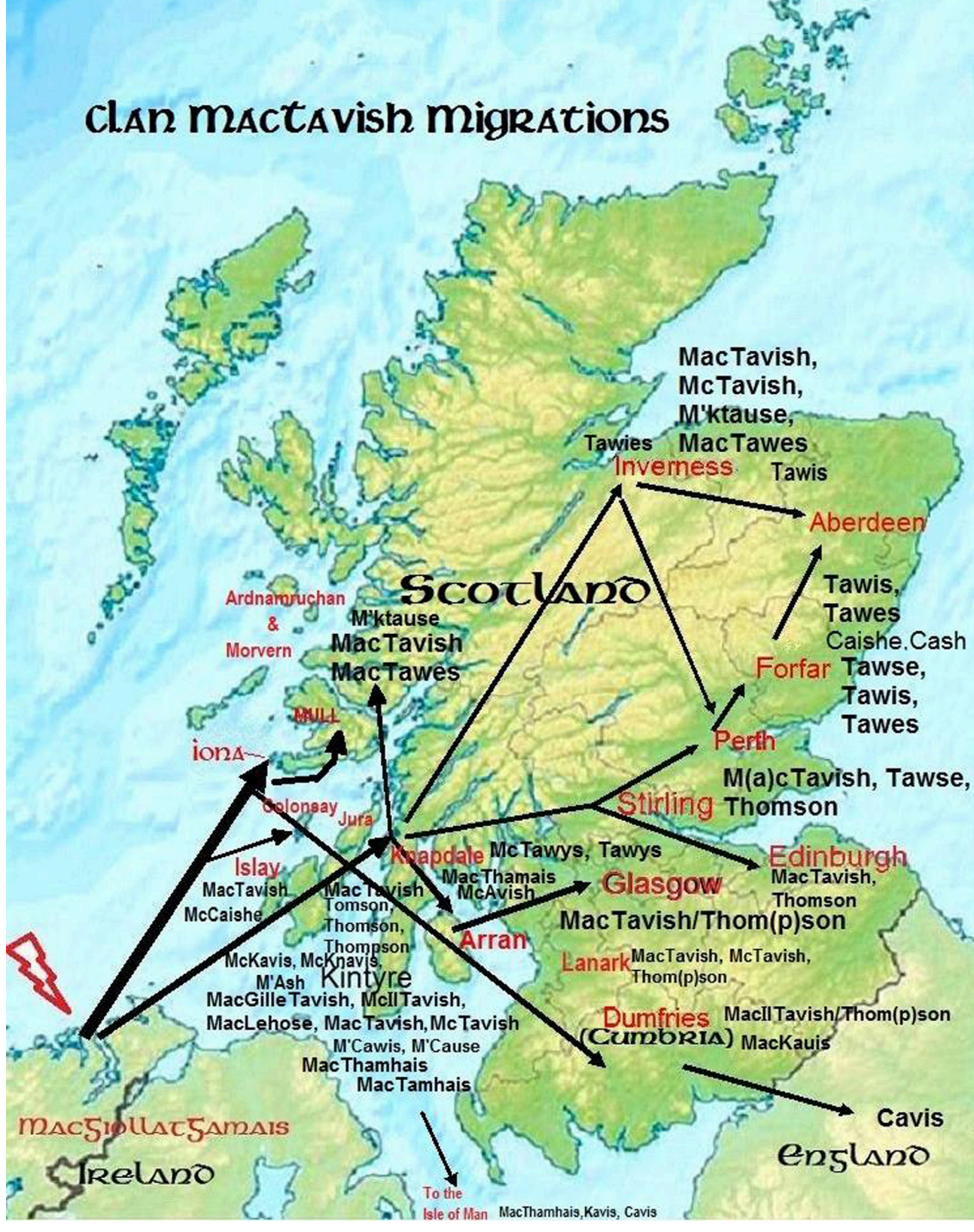
Muirchertach mac Erca
6th century

MIGRATION TO SCOTLAND

Boar clan went to Scotland (Alba) during 6th century

Clan MacTavish


A map of the LOST KINGDOM of Guill and Irguill of the Cenél nDuach, ancestors of the Clan MacTavish.
The northern part of what is now County Donegal, Ireland. Created by Patrick Thompson.
Cashel-Na-Vean (Caiseal na bhFiann) Fort of the Finians
Fanad
The Horn Head
Cruach na Madahd (Sliab Irguill)
Sheephaven Bay
Rosguill Old Guill
HornHead Old Irguill
Ganiamore (Grainne Mhor Also Sliab Guill)
Cashel-Na-Duini (Dooey's Castle)
Dunfanaghy (Fort of the Windukatti / Cenél nDuach)
An Caiseal Mor
Muckish Mountain (The Hog's Back)
The later Barony of Kilmacrenan
Town
Rath or Ring Fort
Mountain



Spread of the members of Clan MacTavish from Donegal (Ireland) to Scotland

REITIA AND BREIT

Brigantia, the goddess of the Brigantes tribe in Great Britain. The sanskrit word "brih" means 'to expand'.

The Atlantic Veneti are traditionally described as brave and threatening warriors, heedless of fear and tiredness, and experienced seamen who invoked the divine protection of the Dioscuri before facing the open sea. "Britons" is instead the Latin name for the inhabitants of the isle of Great Britain, but the same population is called with different variants: Qritani/Qriteni (with the Q-Celtic), Pritani/Priteni (by the Greeks and with the P-Celtic), Phrydeni (in the text *Y Gododdin*) and Cruithni (ancient Irish). According to the current interpretation, Cruithni simply means 'local people' and however the name was circumscribed to the north of Ireland, including Donegal. If we exclude the initial variants [B-] [Q-] [P-] and [C-], what remains is the **rit* root, which is the same root of the Venetic goddess Reitia.

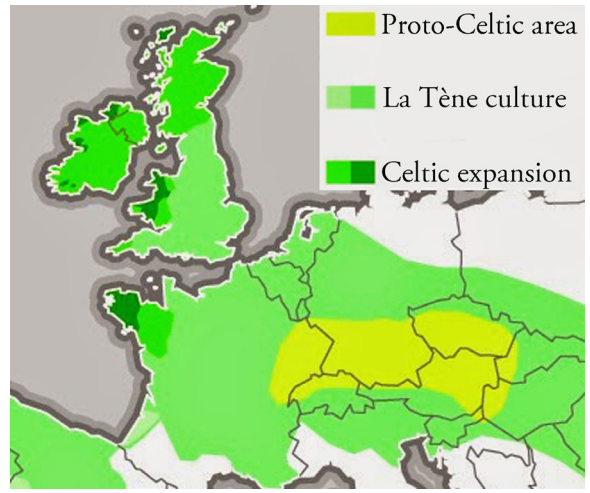
The same goes for the goddess Brigit: if we exclude the initial [B], the **riit* root remains – indeed the variant Brìde is read as [briid]; therefore Reitia and Brigit could be two emanations of the same European goddess. Brigit was probably originally a Sun Goddess since a legend of St. Brigit's birth report she was born at sunrise and from the forehead of the new born a tower of flame burst going from the Earth to the Heaven. Brigit is present among all the four groups of the Atlantic Veneti: the name variants are *Breit* or *Ffraid* in Wales, *Brigantis* in Armorican Brittany, *Brid* in Scotland (Iona) and *Brig*, *Brigid*, *Brigh*, *Brighit* in Ireland – where Donegal's legends mention her as the daughter of Dagda. Consequently, Brigit appears as the dominating and much venerated goddess in Britain, a region that was given her name (as Reitia gave her name to the mountain region of Raetia I and Raetia II). A Scottish story narrates of Bride and Angus fighting the single-eyed and blue-faced Winter Goddess. Related to Brigit is probably the toponym of the city of Brechin (Angus) and among the hydronyms the River Breint in Wales and the River Brent in England (even in the *Venetia* the River Brenta was called *Erétainos*).

In Roman syncretism, Brigantia and Brigit correspond to the goddess Minerva and, not by chance, also Reitia has been related to Athena/Minerva. A small bronze with Minerva's bust was found in Cardean, one of the Roman forts in Angus; while a big temple with classical features is dedicated to Minerva in Bath (County of Somerset). Near Hadrian's wall, a place of worship for Coventina, the goddess of wells and springs, was the sanctuary of Carrawburgh, where there was an inscription dedicated to Minerva.

BRYTHONIC AND GAELIC

The texts that have come to us from the Venetic language are inscriptions of worship and epitaphs no longer than ten words each. However, scholars have succeeded in singling out certain intrinsic grammar features of Venetic. In 1950, on the basis of seven critical elements found in Venetic, Krahe claimed that the Venetic language is an independent branch of the Indo-European family. Of these seven aspects – according to Gvozdanović – four are in common with Celtic, three with Italic and one with Germanic. A feature of Venetic that was considered unique and that seemed to separate Venetic from all others languages – that is the *-to* ending in the third person singular – actually finds its equivalent in the Celtic *t-preterite*. The probabilities of a close connection between Venetic and Celtic turn out to be higher than the connection with Italic. Against the current opinion among Italian universities, this led Gvozdanović to directly classify the Venetic language within the Celtic group, instead of inside the Italic one. The exclusion from the Italic strain had already been advanced by Lejeune, who found only few lexical matchings and a lot of important differences in the religious and institutional terminology of the two languages (for instance, *aisu* 'god', a term similar to *Asi* in Northern Mythology and to the Vedic Sanskrit gods *Asuras*).

Important isoglosses of Venetic and Celtic, but not of Italic, are both the word order with the verb in second position and the contraposition of the *tense* to the *lax* (the tenseness made by a strong and a weak consonant) as the grounding of the consonant system. Celtic is, however, a rather non-homogenous linguistic cauldron. We can, then, wonder "what" type of Celtic the Venetic shares its aspects with: definitely not with Po Valley Celtic according to Polybius, but with Brythonic (i.e. ancient Breton and Welsh) and with the current Breton dialect of the Vannetais. With these languages Venetic shares numerous other lexical matchings – besides those described by Krahe – that are not mere coincidences, but impressive similarities in which all the isoglosses acquire an overall meaning and are structurally well justified. So did Brythonic influence Venetic or vice versa? The Celtic expansion reached the specific Atlantic Venetic territories – Brittany, Wales and Donegal – last. The Veneti people were surely a more ancient population than that of the Celts; thus, if there was linguistic exchange, it would more likely have been from Venetic to Brythonic. Worthy of mention is Tacitus' expression *lingua britanniae proprior*, which states how in Great Britain a language similar to that of the Baltic Aestii was spoken. Surely, the Aestii were not Celts and James

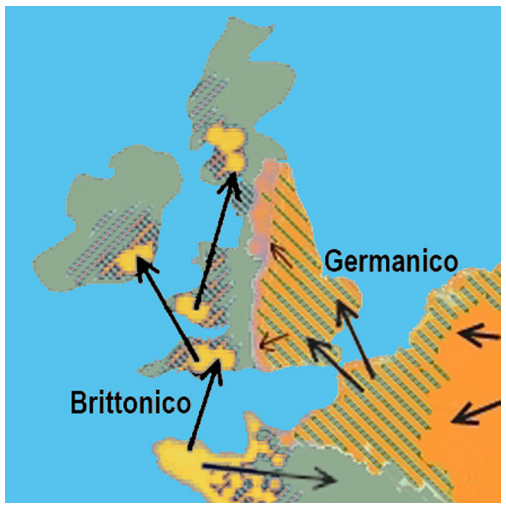


The Celtic expansion, according to the Centre national de documentation pédagogique (France)

Cowles Prichard, comparing European languages in his early studies of 1857, sustained the eastern origin of the "Celtic Nations".

Some do not believe that Tacitus is a reliable author, but they may not have an in-depth knowledge of his biography: the historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (55-120 AD) married Giulia Agricola, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Gneo Giulio Agricola. Born in Forum Iulii, this Roman politician and general played a decisive role in the conquest of Britain. To avoid any misunderstanding, therefore, the essential point of our linguistic problem will be as following: is Brythonic a pure Celtic language or was it influenced by Venetic? Gvozdanović's enlightening assumption is that the Vannetais dialect is a sort of historical connection between Venetic and Brythonic. Vannetais shows indeed a kind of autonomy, having systematic differences from other Breton dialects (but not from Cornish). Some features, such as palatalization and lenition, are clear reminiscences of the development of Slavonic. Even Jackson had noted the presence of archaic aspects in Vannetais. As a consequence, from an ethnographic point of view, we could wonder how much of the Veneti tribe was present in the strain of Britons, intended here in a broader sense as a family that shares a common culture extending to Brittany, Cornwall and Wales.

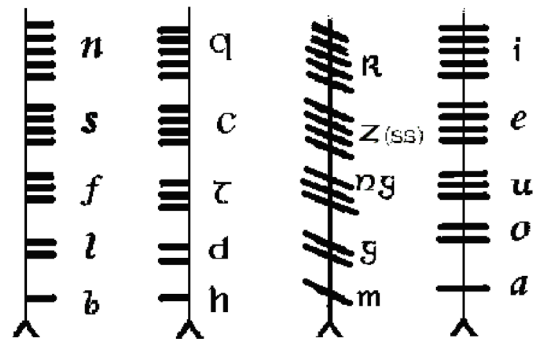
Brythonic is a language that seems to follow the features and migratory flows of the Atlantic Veneti: it fully developed in Brittany and from there it spread north to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. Since the Brythonic speakers were "sailors", the language first spread along the shores and only later migrated slowly to the inland. In the 5th century, Brythonic started to be replaced by Irish Gaelic, as well as by the idioms spoken by the Vikings and Germans (Anglo-Saxons). The replacement was perpetuated all over England, except for Wales and Cornwall. According to Fleuriot, the Celtic language survived in Armorica until the 7th century AD and was thus still present there during the development of Arthurian literature. Since the Breton language was Brythonic and not Gaelic, Breton and Welsh were very similar and reciprocally comprehensible for a long time (until the 15th century). Brythonic was probably also the language of the Venicones, as there are many Brythonic toponyms in the Scottish Lowlands which were part of the Venicones' territory. Some believe that also the very name of King Cunedda derives from the Brythonic *kunodagos* ('good hound').



Brythonic from Brittany to England

Kenneth Jackson claims that the Picts spoke a Gallo-Brythonic variant and so, linguistically and maybe also archaeologically, they could have been P-Celtics. If the Venicones were a mysterious and obscure population, certainly the Picts were no less and the name that they used to define their tribes is unknown.

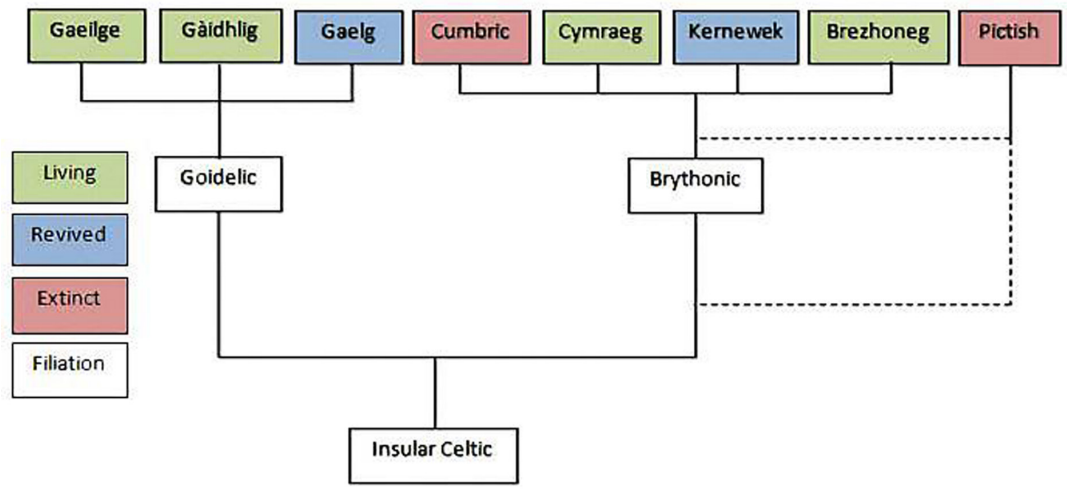
Ogham (from the ancient Irish *ogam*) is a kind of alphabet that was used by the Picts to transcribe their language. Its main feature is that of not having letters of different shapes, but of obtaining instead the various letters using a different amount of engravings: right, left or through a line that represents the fulcrum of the writing.



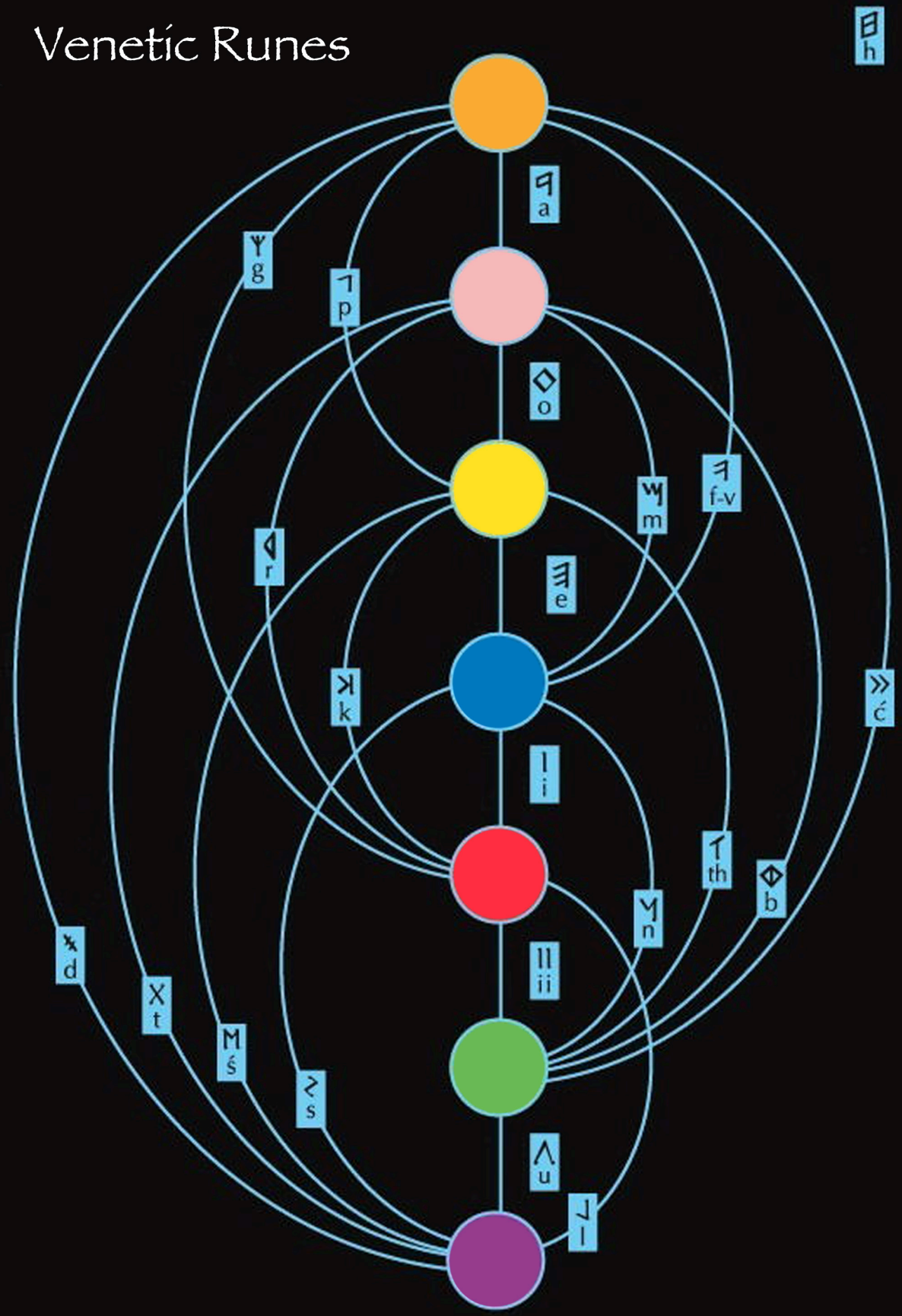
Ogham alphabet

The Gaels, or Scots, were the Celtic population that landed in Ireland in an unspecified era and spread to Scotland in the 5th century AD. The Gaelic of Ulster (or *Gaeilge Uladh*) is one of the three main Irish dialects nowadays spoken only in Donegal and is quite similar to Scottish Gaelic. According to Ewan Campbell, the Scots founded the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata in Western Scotland after moving there from Antrim (Ireland). The Scots sent away the native Picts from the area of Argyll in Scotland and, after the withdrawal of the Romans from England, the Gaels probably filled the power gap in Angus after the migration of the Venicones' tribe from Eastern Scotland to Wales.

The Adriatic Venetic shares less isoglosses with Gaelic than Brythonic does. Although they both come from insular Celtic, Gaelic can be classified as a different linguistic branch from Brythonic. On a formal level, the clear distinction is between the Q-Celtic (Gaelic or Irish) and the P-Celtic (Breton, ancient Welsh, Tweed Valley language, Cornish of Cornwall). The difference lies in the pronunciation of the Indo-European sound *qu*, which in Q-Celtic is a strong *c* or an aspirate *ch*, while in P-Celtic it is a *p*. For example, 'head' is [*ceann*] in Gaelic and [*pen*] in Welsh. There is thus evidence of a clear difference between Gaelic and Brythonic, which makes the P-Celtic a quite archaic group and in this sense similar to the West-Slavonic languages, that is, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Sorbian, Kashubian and Polabian (Wends).



Venetic Runes



The various "runic-like" alphabets – archaic Greek, Phoenician, Phrygian and Etruscan – seem to resemble each other. Among the different theories about the runic alphabet's origins (Latin, Greek, Germanic), the North-Italic or Etruscan theory is the most accredited today. Officially, the ancient Venetic alphabet is supposed to derive indirectly from that of *Chalcis Greeks*, but it is useful to make some clarifications:

1) The Veneti were called "Eneti" by the Greeks because archaic Greek did not have the letter **V**. The **V** was present, instead, in late Venetic – as well as in Phrygian alphabet and West Slavonic of Poland's Wends. The Venetic graphic sign for **U** was the same one used for the **V** sound by the Wends, who therefore had the **V** unlike the Chalcis.

2) In archaic Greek, there was no **G** consonant, which was instead present among the Adriatic Veneti with the same rune used by the Wends – who had their own alphabet: "the Wendic Runic".

3) Like some old Slavonic languages, and in particular Wendic Runic, Venetic did not have the **F** consonant, which was replaced by **VH**; the **F** [fi] letter is, instead, present in Greek.

The graphic form of the vowels mimes the form of the lips and of the oral cavity while pronouncing the sound. For example, the [O] shapes the open mouth with circle-like lips. Of the famous runic *Futhark* alphabet (from the sequence of the first six letters), we find a lot of typical magic-symbolic interpretations that associate each rune with an image of the archetype, a position of the limbs, a tree or a divinity, a natural element or an animal; they are suggestive attributions but they are not demonstrable. Among the Venetic priestesses appointed to writing, there seems to have been a magic-religious runic heritage, handed down orally and lost today.

"Enogenei enetioi eppetaris albarenioi".
Paduan stele that can maybe be translated in:
'Albareno venetic knight son of Eno'. 400-300 BC.

THE STONE OF DESTINY

The Stone of Clackmannan, placed on the top of the retaining pillar.

The stone of Manau in Clackmannan (Scotland) was a holy stone for the local Menapii and Venicones tribes, and was probably the expression of a common god of the sea: "Manannan". The name of the Menapii and of the god Manannan vaguely alludes to the lunar god Men, the Minotaur and the northern Menulis.

During the Middle Ages, another huge granitic stone in the heart of Galloway Forest Park became famous as the stone of King Robert Bruce, to commemorate the victory over the English people (1307). The Stone of Destiny is, instead, more ancient and today belongs to the folkloristic heritage of Scotland and to children's stories. Its origins are obscure and mysterious, surrounded by a halo of sacredness and a sense of identity. It is told that it was brought from Ireland to the Isle of Iona and then kept in the castle of Dunstaffnage (Argyll) for some time. Finally, in 843 – with the disappearance of the power of the Picts – it was brought to Scone (Perthshire) by Cinaed Mac Alpin. Macbeth, who was king from 1040 to 1057 and descendant of Mac Alpin (in no way related to Shakespeare's Macbeth), according to legend brought the original stone to his fortress, replacing it with a fake in the pre-existing place.

The Stone of Destiny, Scone Palace

The stone – *Lia Fa* in Gaelic – ideally follows the migration of the Gaels from Ireland and its myth belongs to the myth of the origin of the Gaels. Before the arrival of the Gaels, Scone was an important centre of power for the Picts and it is plausible that the kings of the Picts were elected there. If it is true that the Gaels wanted to adopt the form of inauguration of the Picts' kings, they could have also taken up the royal Pictish ritual that included the Stone of Destiny. A prediction always followed the Stone: the oracle said that its possessor would have reigned successfully wherever he brought it. Therefore, it was particularly longed for symbol capable of attracting every dynasty of conquerors. If we observe the dimensions of the Clackmannan stone, it is plausible to think that it could have been used as a throne by the new king. The first kings were not crowned and they simply sat on the stone in Scone.

For appearance's sake, the Gaels might have chosen to establish their royal residence in Scone, since this would have better legitimated their intrusion in the eyes of local people. Moot Hill, the hillock in front of the Scone Royal Palace, is pervaded with a cosmologic symbolism and represents both the *axis mundi* and the *imago mundi*. For the Picts from the Venicones' area, Scone coincided with the central province of Gowrie, surrounded by the four provinces of Angus, Fife, Strathearn and Atholl. Later, with the expansion of the kingdom of Alba from the western to the eastern coast, Scone remained the cosmologic centre of the Gaels' new kingdom. By adopting the same sacred place where the king sat on the stone to promulgate laws or judge the subjects and by taking up the same rituals of royal inauguration, the Gaels were able to ingratiate themselves with the locals. This is a tactic that was also used in a later era by the English kings, who – from 1603 with the union of Scotland and England – were crowned on the sacred stone in Scotland, in order to suffocate the independence vein of the Scottish. During modern times, in 1953, Queen Elizabeth II wanted to use the same ceremonial ritual. The lust for occulting a myth, so rooted in the people, induced Edward I of England, called "the Hammer of the Scots", to take the stone from Scone to London in 1296, where it remained for seven hundred years within the wood en throne built appositely for it in Westminster Abbey. Only in 1996 it returned to Scotland to the Edinburgh Castle in grand manner and with the permission of the then Prime Minister John Major.

Pictish Stone, Meigle Museum (Angus)

In 1937, the geological analysis of the Stone of Destiny (whether it was the original stone or the substitute) led Davidson to declare that the stone had been extracted with reasonable certainty in Eastern Perthshire, that is near Scone. Geology and tradition converge when recalling the first documented name of the stone: "the Eastern Stone", as it was called in a 1060 Gaelic poem, maybe referring to Eastern Scotland.

The royal stone is a symbol that is widespread in the Atlantic area, so much so that even the western Saxons had their stone for the ritual of the king's coronation. Even in Ireland the new kings sat on a stone throne placed outside; there, the throne was a development of the royal stone and had the same function of a sacred object, on which the king ritually sat. The duty of the Stone of Destiny is a sacred legitimation of the new king. This also applies to another Scottish stone that had footprints engraved on it, so that – like in the Cinderella story – it legitimated only the king whose foot would have comfortably fit in the print on the stone. Intuitively the same function of sacred legitimation, in the sense of a magic-traditional identity, also applies to the stone from which King Arthur (not being the King's first-born son) must magically take out the Excalibur sword. The sword in the stone rises to a clear symbol of the *axis mundi* ('world axis') and only the king who coincided with this axis would have the title and the power to be fit for his difficult task. A good king must have the political virtue of "foreseeing the best future for his people". The help of a seer, such as Merlin, thus assumes here all his pragmatic meaning.

THE VENEDOTIA HAS A WIZARD

As for Arthur, the identification of the legendary figure of Merlin the Wizard within a precise historical context is uncertain. It is possible that this literary figure was born from the merging of two different 6th century bards, who communicated with each other in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (prior to 1250) and belonged to the school of the Native Faith of the Bretons. The first bard stayed at the court of the pagan king Gwenddolau ap Ceidio, who was tenaciously fought in the battle of Arfderydd and killed around 573 because he was a pagan. After the Romans' withdrawal from the island, he ruled over the Bretons of the Arfderydd Castle (now Arthuret), a dominion in South-Western Scotland and in the Carlisle area. The name of the bard at court was **Myrddin** (Merlin), his sister was Gwendydd and his wife was called Gwendolyn, all female names that sounded Venetic-like. The *Vita Merlini*, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth, narrates that Myrddin went crazy out of grief for the defeat and killing of Gwenddolau by the Christian kings and that he ran into the forest of Caledonia, where he wandered lonely without peace.

The second bard is **Taliesin** (ca. 534 - ca. 599), the most ancient poet writing in Welsh, some of whose works have come down to us. In the text *The Spoils of Annwfn*, there is a first connection between Taliesin and Arthur, who travels in the Otherworld and obtains the magic Cauldron, prototype of the Grail. A similar Welsh story that talks about Taliesin, but without the presence of Arthur, is the cauldron tale of *Branwen*. Finally, Taliesin is mentioned as King Arthur's main bard in the story of *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Geoffrey of Monmouth made him become friends with Myrddin and, together, they escort Arthur's corpse to Avalon after the defeat of Camlann. Taliesin helps his disciple Myrddin during his days of madness and, after his healing, stays with him in the forest of Caledonia.

A strong correspondence is drawn between Taliesin and the tribe of Cunedda, which is defined by the bard as "*the tribe that dominates the land*", with a clear reference to the Venedoti. Dedicated to Cunedda there is an elegy that has form, prosody, grammar and orthography that are distinctive of Taliesin's poems and where Taliesin's name appears, even if it may or may not have been written directly by him. According to Williams Ab Ithel, the elegy is the product of a Taliesin taking advantage of Cunedda's royal munificence, but the text was written in the 6th century by a poet who really felt bound to honour the dynastic line and to bitterly weep Cunedda's death (ca. in 460, when he was 74). There are bonds between Taliesin and a son of Cunedda called Einion, a powerful king of *Venedotia* (Gwynedd) who gave his name to the fort in which Taliesin grew up. According to the genealogic reconstruction made by David Sims and Graham Phillips, Einion Yrth could simply have been Uter Pendragon (Yrthr Pen Draig), that is, King Arthur's father. For sure, Taliesin – head of the bards – had properties in north-western Wales in Arllechwedd, which were taken away by Maelgwn, Prince of *Venedotia*. This is what echoes in the invective hurled by Taliesin against Maelgwn, followed by the Vad Velen curse, a pestilence that reached the kingdom of *Rhôs* under the form of a snake. According to Gildas (6th cent.), the *Venedotos* Maelgwn murdered his uncle, i.e. Owain Ddanwyn who reigned over *Rhôs*. In late literature, Maelgwn turned into the Medraut of Camlan Battle (*Annales Cambriae* - 10th cent.) and in the *Votadinos* son of King Lot (*Historia Regum Britanniae* - 12th cent.).

LOHENGRIN

Lohengrin's arrival, by August von Heckel. Neuschwanstein.

By order of King Arthur, Lohengrin, son of Parsifal thus a Venedotos, rushed to the young duchess Elsa of Brabant's aid, coming from the sea on a "ship pulled by a swan". The aquatic bird shows itself in the key points of the Arthurian legend. *La Primière Continuation du Roman de Perceval* (end of the 12th cent.) evokes a dead knight that is transported on a small ship pulled by a swan out of sea, where it disappears. Two swan wings and the image of a beautiful woman were engraved on the ship on which King Arthur was invited to go by the Lady of the Lake. Moreover, Layamon's *Brut* (written between 1185 and 1216) claims that Arthur's helmet was named Goswhif, an ancient English variant of *white goose*. Ygraine, Arthur's mother, can certainly be associated with the ancient Irish *gigren* ('goose'). According to Robert Graves, the swan is one of the symbols of the goddess Brigit and in Gaelic Scotland her animal was the white swan. Graves cleverly saw the Aegean prototype of Brigit in Brizo, a goddess of Delos, to which women gave small votive boats as gifts. By prophetic dreams she gave instructions on fisheries and navigation.

The Irish Óengus – the god of the birds – had the ability to turn into a swan, so some authors associate him with Maponos, that is Apollo. Óengus is a member of the Tuatha Dé Danann and is also called Óengus Óg "Óengus the young", as the god of love and poetic inspiration.

The myth narrates that his father, the Dagda, had a relationship with Boann, Nechtan's wife. In order to hide their love, the Dagda stopped the Sun for nine months, at the end of which Óengus was born. The sweet girl Caer and her female friends were supernatural creatures and turned into swans in Samhain. Óengus implored Caer's father to marry her, but the man refused to give his permission, because a prophecy told him that he would die the day of his daughter's wedding.

Caer lived near a lake, a sort of passage to the Otherworld. Only in Samhain, when the borders between the worlds faded and became as thin as veils, Óengus could escape with his loved one. So, the first of November, Óengus went to the Lake of the Mouth of the Dragon and there found 150 girls who had been turned into swans and chained in pairs. If he wanted to marry Caer, Óengus had to find his loved one among the large crowd of girls turned into swans. All of them had a pretty chain around their neck but only Caer's was made of gold: so he succeeded in finding his girl, Caer Ibormeith, chained there to the wall with a gold chain. Suddenly Óengus turned into a swan and the two youths flew away together, circling above the lake and singing celestial music, which made the listeners fall into a deep sleep that lasted three days and three nights.

Situlas used as 'wine buckets or funeral ossuaries' were a typical feature of the Veneti and were made on a bronze lamina, using two kinds of fine techniques: engraving though chisel and in-relief. A situla of extraordinary documentary value, thanks to its decorative marks, was recently found in Posmon, at the foot of Montebelluna Hill. Although the decorative marks gradually disappeared from the surface and now there are no traceable images on the situla anymore, they were luckily rescued from oblivion thanks to a prompt action of recovery through radiography carried out by the archaeologists, who have aptly set up a well-organised exposition at the Museum of Montebelluna.

The Posmon necropolis dates back to the first centuries of the Iron Age and there, in accordance with the Venetic custom, only cremation was practiced and the urn was placed in a tomb with funerary objects. At the end of the 6th cent. BC, the graves also took a tumulus-form (one-meter-high, five metres wide), with a perimeter delimited by cobblestones or stakes, to mark the funeral place of the family or clan they belonged to.

The story portrayed by the situla is a sequence of life scenes, a real portrayal of the salient activities of that time. It represents an incredible legacy, as if the ancient Veneti wanted to leave us an exhaustive photograph of their existence. The decorative marks are allocated in three horizontal bands: the upper, the middle and the lower band.

• In the upper band, an equestrian procession is described. The riders open the procession; then, in the first chariot, a high-rank woman is standing near the charioteer. Behind them, aristocratic figures are seated near charioteers in a row of chariots decorated with symmetrical birds; a prisoner is tied by the wrists to the last chariot. What is the usual meaning of a procession? In a certain sense it is a symbolic journey. Above all, the ancient Veneti are telling us: *we are long-distance travellers*.

• In the middle band, a joyful party is portrayed. The gaiety is expressed by features that are still common nowadays: plays, music, wine and sex. The athletic games consist in a boxing match with dumbbells; there is the audience, an umpire and a crested helmet used as the trophy for the winner. In the meantime the lower-class women carry containers on their heads or spin wool on the side, while the aristocrats listen to the music of lyres and pan pipes or share the euphoria of wine and make love, as is shown in the coupling scene on a small bed. On the whole, the situla seems to have a purely profane meaning, maybe it represents a wedding party. Yet, if we want to read an allegorical meaning between the lines, a general plan exists. First of all, the *climax* of the dynamic representation is the *cauldron* placed at the geometrical centre of the whole graffiti: the vessel – used for wine-making – contains the sacred drink essential for the libation ritual. As in the ritual the liquid in the ladle was poured onto the objects to purify them, so in the picture a servant offers wine to the couple during the *Symplegma* ('the sexual act'). The situla – hollow like the uterus – thus becomes the symbol of female fertility, while the ladle resembles the male organ that is repeatedly ushered into the lumen.

Since the Veneti used situlas in the cult of the dead, it is evident that they gave them a sacred meaning, which can in many ways be assimilated to those of the ritual cauldron.

Ritual cauldron (Stirlingshire), 600-400 BC.

Worthy of notice is the magic cauldron, "rimmed with pearls around the edge" found by Arthur "in the Otherworld" in the Welsh poem *The Spoils of Annwfn (Book of Taliesin)*. Originally, *Annwfn* was certainly the pagan paradise reached by sea. There is a curious corroboration of this in a manuscript which speaks of *Margan dwywes o annwfyn* 'Margan (Morgan), goddess from Annwn', who concealed Arthur in Ynis Avallach (the Isle of Apples) to heal him of his wounds. It is also significant that the welsh hero **Peredur** comes upon nine witches and their cauldron. Taliesin, Arthur and nine maidens are brought together to an Otherworld island in Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Arthur's passing to Avalon in *Vita Merlini* (ca. 1148). It is thus easy to see a surprising equivalence between the Grail and the Venetic situla. During the Middle Ages the tales of the chief of bards Taliesin (considered a contemporary of Arthur) would have influenced those who wrote about the Grail.

Around the 12th century, the French literary environment gave birth to the legend of *Joseph of Arimathea*, who – before burying Jesus – carefully washed his blood-covered body and preserved the water with the blood in a cup. He was then imprisoned in a tower by the Judeans and left to die of hunger and thirst, but Joseph of Arimathea survived thanks to "celestial nourishment". For several generations, Joseph left the precious calyx to his sons, until it came down to the Patriarch of Jerusalem and then, in 1257, to the King of England. Other legends tell that, in England, the Holy Grail was lost and only a brave knight in shining armour would have found it: this version of the Grail belongs to the cycle of Lancelot and the first explicit reference to it is present in *Joseph d'Arimathie* by Robert de Boron (13th century), where Jesus appears to Joseph to give him the Grail and invite him to Britain with his followers. However, the most ancient narrations of the Arthurian cycle do not at all mention the Grail intended as the calyx that gathers the blood from the Crucifixion. It is evident that Robert de Boron, an unequivocal defender of Christendom, first introduced the theme of the Holy Grail not to exalt a Celtic myth, but with the aim of "Christianizing" the Celtic legends and take advantage of the pros of their popularity.

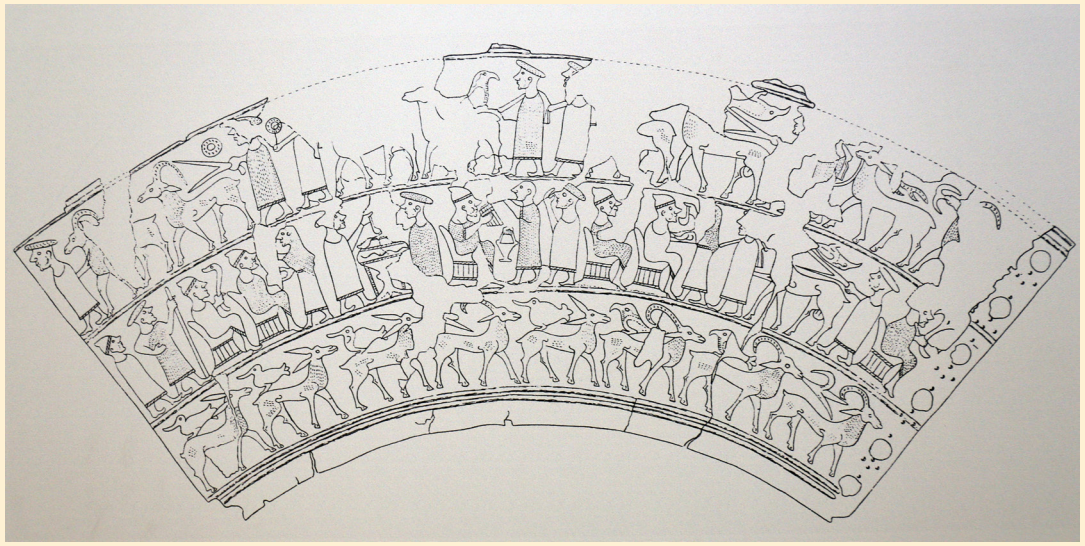
• In the lower band of the situla, outdoor activities are portrayed, like deer hunting (the animal is chased on horseback and hit by spears). At that time, the weapons used for hunting were the bow and arrow, the sling, the spear and the javelin, as well as nets, snares and traps. The prey were wild boars, ducks, hares, pigeons and dormice. Ritual and sacrificial hunting related to the cult of the Lady of the Wild Animals, Artemis, was also practiced. In Greece, the feast of *Arkteia* was provided for the adolescent initiation of young girls, who had to "act as little she-bears before marriage". A sort of ritual hunting was enacted and the little girls, after having moved around the altar, started to take their clothes off and to run away naked, while figures dressed up as bears personified the mythological tale of Callisto, who was turned into a she-bear.

The figurated situla of Posmon. Archaeological Museum of Montebelluna (Province of Treviso)

In the lower band of the Posmon situla there is also a peasant wearing a conical headdress (similar to the Vietnamese ones) who is holding a plough in its hand and is whipping an ox. Both the ploughing and the coupling motifs are also present in the Sanzeno situla and can thus be considered as recurring stereotypical decorations. A man pushing an ox is present in the Benvenuti situla (6th century BC), an artistic masterpiece of the Atestine art, where there are also two boxers with dumbbells and a helmet as the reward. In the Benvenuti situla, a servant tries to sell a horse to a Lord, seated on a throne with a cup of libation in his hand and wearing a wide mantle and a broad-brimmed hat. In the Vače Situla, found near Ljubljana, the upper part similarly shows the procession-journey of the knights and – like in the Posmon situla – there are the lyrist and the libations, as well as a central figure holding a bipartite sceptre with bird heads (a clear emblem of the Solar Boat).

The Etruscan-Venetic situla at the Museum of Rhode Island, Providence (USA)

Fighters with dumbbells and a prise cauldron appear in the upper band of a situla which has been preserved in the United States, at the RISD Museum of Providence in Rhode Island. Worthy of notice is how the swan-neck-like symmetry of the cauldron is simply a stylization of the Solar Boat/Cup. Despite the clear Etruscan influence on the find, the situla is not a traditional Etruscan vessel, but is associated with the Venetic culture.



Situla from the archaeological site of Magdalenska Gora (near Ljubljana). The drinking scenes of the situla, as well as the clothes and the form of the cauldron, are similar to both the Vače (Ljubljana) and the Posmon situlas to indicate a clear cultural homogeneity that extended to the Central Slovenia.

THE REAL BIRTH OF VENICE

Venetia the praiseworthy, formerly full of the dwellings of the nobility, touches on the south Ravenna and the Po, while on the east it enjoys the delightsomeness of the Ionian shore, where the alternating tide now discovers and now conceals the face of the fields by the ebb and flow of its inundation. (Cassiodorus)

Reading the sketchy information contained in many ancient literary works, persistent is the feeling that Eraclea – the superb city of rich temples, of sumptuous palaces where Byzantine art lavished its masterpieces, the capital of the estuary envied by the Byzantines and Longobards – had been founded unexpectedly, due to an event such as the conquest of Oderzo by Rothari in the short period between the fall of the Greek government and the death of the emperor Heraclius (638-640). The name of Eraclea, the precursor of Venice, is mentioned for the first time in 640 in a papal document, namely Pope Severinus' bull, which established the new dioceses of Torcello and Eraclea in the inner part of the Lagoon.

The history of this settlement in the Lower Piave area has, however, much more ancient origins. Many centuries before the Christian era the over sixty islets, between the mouths of the Adige and Isonzo rivers, were inhabited by lively communities, which were rich of verve and fond of hunting and fishing. Eraclea later rose in the central isle of the coast: the sweet and enchanting Melidissa island. The lagoon archipelago mingled with the mouths of the rivers that deposited muddy banks and sand and where grey herons stopped and sea swallows built nests among the pinewoods and the blooming dunes. Through the navigability of these rivers, the islands gravitated towards the hinterland, whose closest and most important centre was *Opitergium*, the current city of Oderzo. It is precisely in the bay of Oderzo – roughly off today's Cortellazzo – that the island of Melidissa rose and functioned as a harbour for the inhabitants of *Opitergium*. It is generally known that Asinius Pollio, having occupied Padua with seven legions in order to subdue it to Marcus Antonius (Caesar's heir), forced the Veneti of the cities to take refuge on the islands. During the Roman period, other considerably prestigious urban centres, such as Altinum and Concordia Sagittaria, flourished along the coast, thus the development of Melidissa was completed only after the decline of the Roman empire. Those who settled the island had an efficient fleet which was used to trade with the East, to control the river traffic and to provide defence against piracy, which had menaced the Adriatic coasts for centuries. In the 2nd century AD, the Eastern *Venetia* region, which was a passage between Eastern Europe and the Italian Peninsula, suffered the repeated invasions of migrant populations and armies, followed in the 4th century by the invasions of the Visigoths, the Huns, the Vandals, the Ostrogoths and, finally, the Longobards. In order to find refuge from these destructive raids, the inhabitants of the local cities sought shelter on the lagoon islands: the inhabitants of Aquileia moved to Grado, those of Altinum moved to Torcello and those of Concordia to Caorle, whereas the natives of Padua chose Malamocco and those of *Opitergium* found in Melidissa a protected refuge (even if the Via Annia, the consular Roman road going from Altinum to Aquileia, passed through Concordia a little further north, not far away from the island).

Tradition has it that in 169 AD, the whole population of Oderzo moved to the island of Melidissa, in order to escape from the Marcomanni (a Germanic tribal confederation). Therefore, ethnically "the Venetians" would be the direct descendants of the Baltic traders that founded the market ('*terg*') of *Opitergium*. On 25 March 421 the church dedicated to the Apostle James was consecrated in Rialto – the core of the future Venice – at the presence of the bishops of Oderzo, Padua, Altinum and Treviso. In the 5th cent. AD, although still dependent from the dioceses of Eraclea and Torcello, six "main towns" of the lagoon expansion – Grado, Caorle, Torcello, Malamocco, Chioggia and Melidissa – had already developed around Rialto.

In the 6th century AD, Theodoric's minister Cassiodorus wrote memorable words of praise for the tribunes of the *Venetia*'s lagoons: "Here after the manner of water-fowl have you fixed your home. […] For by a twisted and knotted osier-work the earth there collected is turned into a solid mass, and you oppose without fear to the waves of the sea so fragile a bulwark, since forsooth the mass of waters is unable to sweep away the shallow shore, the deficiency in depth depriving the waves of the necessary power. Your whole attention is concentrated on your salt-works. […] There it may be said is your subsistence-money coined. […] In the quest for gold a man may be lukewarm: but salt every one desires to find; and deservedly so, since to it every kind of meat owes its savour."

The prosperity of the lagoon archipelago was favoured by the impenetrable estuary, the good air of the islands, the presence of drinking water and the abundance of food, as well as by the freedom and hospitality that reigned there. In 466, to ratify a situation that had existed for a long time, the *Venetia's* islands founded a tribune-ruled federal Republic that was independent from the Ostrogoths in the mainland, with whom they nevertheless maintained a good relationship. Cut off by an impassable tract of land made of shallows and marshlands, the insular Veneti were able to survive even the devastation that followed the terrible Gothic-Byzantine war, which ended in 533 with the death of the last king of the Goths. The Federation of the Veneti's islands took advantage of the favourable moment to form a stable alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire, but also maintained good neighbourly relations with what remained of the Western Roman Empire. While the Federation's prestige grew, the Byzantine government in Italy tottered and the Longobards started to conquer the Peninsula. This new invasion forced an ever-growing number of people to leave the dry land for the *Venetia's* lagoon, which was deemed safer. Towards the end of the 6th century, there was a new mass migration from Oderzo and hundreds of people took sail to the island of Melidissa, so much so that the synod of the *Venetia and Istria's* bishops even moved the bishop's see from Oderzo to Melidissa. In 638, in order to escape from the Aryan religious persecutions, the Bishop of Oderzo "St. Magnus" moved to Melidissa together with the most important families of *Opitergium*. In the meantime, the Piave River had slowly changed its course and Melidissa had become a peninsula which, in honour of Emperor Heraclius – who had defeated the Persians – took the name of *Heraclia* (Eraclea).

Towards the middle of the 7th century, Eraclea became the biggest city of the estuary. It counted an incredible 90,000 inhabitants and boasted the cathedral of St. Peter Apostle, built by St. Magnus. Having commercial and diplomatic relationships with both the Byzantine court and the Longobard court in Pavia, Eraclea was a real bridge between the West and the East. Trade with the East thrived, particularly with Byzantium, to which the lagoon city was closely related also by political agreements, so much so that for a long time it was a broker of Byzantine affairs in Northern Italy. More difficult were, instead, the relations with the conquerors of the mainland: Grimoald, King of the Longobards (622-671), ordered the dismemberment of what remained of the city of Oderzo, thereby triggering a new unexpected migration towards the lagoon. Consequently, Eraclea sought protection from the Eastern Empire, while Jesolo (*Equilio*) had close contacts with the Longobards. The divergences between the two poles of the estuary ended in an open conflict and, around 690 AD, the two town armies fought against each other in a pitched battle, with the victory of Eraclea. To make things even more difficult for Eraclea, there were also the Dalmatian pirates, the fearful plunderers of the Eastern routes. This conflictual situation seemed to be so unbearable for Eraclea that, in 697, a general assembly of the citizens was called in St. Peter Apostle's Cathedral. The Patriarch, together with the nobles and the common people, agreed that only a single man, democratically elected by every social class, should take over the reins of government in such a hard time for the future of the city. Paulus of Oderzo (Paoluccio Anafesto) was, therefore, elected the first Duke, or *Doxe* in Venetian.

Paulus of Oderzo, the first Doge in Eraclea (697).

Under the enlightened ruling of the doges, Eraclea lived a period of splendour and moved from one victory to the next thanks to its close alliance with the Byzantines. A memorable feat under the leadership of the doge Orso Participazio (726-736) was the conquest of the city of Ravenna, which had fallen into the hands of the Longobards. Later on, the contrasts with its ancient rival Jesolo rekindled and bloody fights went on until the end of the century, bringing both cities to the brink of reciprocal destruction. Eraclea came out doomed from the wars against Jesolo: its powerful walls had been torn down and its naval power destroyed. The already tragic condition of the population was worsened by a massive raid by the Franks, followed by a new migration of Veneti people, this time directed to the shore of Rialto and Torcello, namely the "emerging Venice", where all the wealthy families of the ancient nobility of Eraclea settled. Having abandoned the riverbanks and diverted the waterways, the marshland inexorably invaded the city of Eraclea, taking possession of it.

URNFIELD CULTURE IN CATALONIA

The origin of Catalan urnfields from the Rhenish-Swiss Group (Rhine River area). The Urnfield culture (ca. 1300 BC - ca. 500 BC) was a Late Bronze Age culture of Central Europe; the name comes from the custom of cremating the dead and placing their ashes in urns which were then buried in wide fields.

The Urnfield culture entered the Iberian Peninsula around 1100-1000 BC. The migration penetrated into Catalonia through France from afar, coming from the Swiss territory situated between the South-west of Germany and the east of France (the Swiss group of the Rhine River). The Catalan urnfield settlements, beyond Catalonia, were along the Ebro valley, the Low Aragon and the north of Valencia.

During the first phase of the Iron Age – which in Catalonia went from the 8th to the 7th century BC – the Phoenicians initiated the silver trade by establishing their colonies along the shore. Numerous ancient literary sources confirm the importance of the silver coming from Catalonia.

The most ancient settlements in Catalonia are located in the north of the region and show some continuity with the neighbouring urnfields that are just beyond the Pyrenees, such as the French settlement of Montségur. It so happens that the famous Montségur Castle – the last refuge of the heretic Cathars on the Pyrenees – is believed by some to be Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Montsalvaesche*, that is, the castle of the Grail in his romance *Parzival*.

Urnfield in Montségur (South-western France)

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THE SOLAR BOAT

"The Solar Boat" on a situla of the late Bronze Age, Carpathian Basin (Tolcsva-Várhegy)

In Northern Europe the spread of the solar cult began in the Middle Bronze Age. In the Late Bronze Age depictions of aquatic birds were also found in numerous sacred images, wherever the votive deposits were located near rivers or swamps in the context of religious beliefs linked to water cults. Two symmetrical aquatic birds were always part of the ancient symbol of the "Solar Boat".

The Solar Boat motif with ornithomorphic *protomes* (sculptural ornaments in the form of a bird) is part of the embossed decorations of bronze foil artefacts made with the technique known as points-and-studs. This ornamental style with the sun-bird motifs is considered by G. von Merhart as main proof of a strong connection between Italy and the Danube-Carpathian area regarding toreutic art between 1000 and 800 BC. The lineage that goes back directly to Danubian *situlae* (type Hajdúböszörmény) is well documented in the *situla* of Rivoli Veronese.

The Solar Boat was the distinctive emblem of the new religion, just as the cross is for Christians or the six-pointed star is for Jews. Witness of this is the obsessive constancy with which it recurs in various kinds of nice artefacts: ceramic and bronze ossuaries, symposium and ceremonial vessels – like incense burners and boat-shaped vases – as well as belts, parade weapons and horse bits. On later artefacts the horse bits are decorated with horses instead of birds, equally related to the theme of the mystical journey of the Sun.

Tal-y-llyn plaque

A treasure was found in *Venedotia* (North Wales) in the Snowdonia National Park, near Tal-y-llyn Lake and about 70 km south of Lake Llyndaw (from which a wounded King Arthur sailed to Avalon). John Waddell pointed out a brass plaque depicting the Solar Boat: there are two symmetrical bird heads in the style of the Iron Age, a period which in the British Isles ranges approximately from 800 BC to the Roman conquest and, in non-Romanized areas, to the 5th century AD.

Artemis, the goblet and the swan

Sacred to Apollo were not only the wolf and the dolphin but especially swans, so much so that a flock of swans circled the island of Delos seven times for the birth of the god. Apollo used to travel on the back of a swan or on a chariot pulled by swans when he had to reach Hyperborea – which according to Pindar can be reached both by land and by the sea – and this beautiful image sheds light on the connection between the Solar Boat and the Apollonian cult. Ancient bards with prophetic power, as well as the lyre player Orpheus, are often compared to swans in classical poetry.

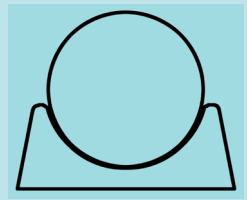
Barbara Lucrezia Paganelli writes: "Coming from the levels below the sanctuary of Artemis in Delos, and dated to the Mycenaean period, is a golden plate that shows a surprising affinity with the two plates found in Italy (Gualdo Tadino and Roca). On these plates a stylised Solar Boat motif is depicted. The picture depicts a boat with bird shaped stern and prow (they are aquatic birds, swans perhaps) and in the centre a solar disk, in place of the solar deity itself. It is important that this solar disk at Delos was not found in the sanctuary of Apollo, but in the sanctuary of Artemis. In the Bronze Age, the Solar Boat was obviously linked to a female divinity, which was called Artemis in Delos, but elsewhere it could be called in any other way".

This is a point of interest because it links the northern Hyperborean female divinity with the cult of the Solar Boat typical of the Urnfield culture. The Mycenaean period lasted until the destruction of the palaces of Mycenae, Tiryns and Pylos in 1200 BC, but there was an additional Mycenaean period III C (1200 – 1050 BC), since such destructions were not accompanied by a sudden disappearance of the Mycenaean civilization and population. This means that the Mycenaean period was both previous and coeval to the Urnfield culture. Chronologically, therefore, there was a possible continuity or conveyance of the symbol of the Solar Boat, through the swans, from the Mycenaean cult to the Urnfield culture or vice versa from the latter to the worship of Artemis (more likely, since Artemis was a later goddess).

The original myth of the Solar Boat in the Urnfield culture was lost. However, we know of a similar myth, older but equally enlightening even if it comes from outside of Europe: in the iconography of the ancient Egyptians this symbol appeared in drawings since the pre-dynastic period, the era before 3200 BC. There were two Solar Boats, which together were called *Maaty* because they represented the goddess *Maat*, the principle of cosmic order. The Solar Boat carried the Sun which took in the morning the form of the sacred scarab (Khepri), at noon of the god Ra and the Phoenix, and at dusk of Atum-Ra.

Ra and the Phoenix on the Boat

After sunset the Sun travelled on the Evening Boat, the "Mesketet", accompanied by other deities who protected him from the perils of the Underworld and the furious attacks of Apophis, "darkness and chaos" often depicted as a cobra. The Egyptians feared that the Underworld could halt the Boat to stop the passing of time: this had happened just once when Isis' pain for her dying son stopped the Boat and the journey of the Sun, until Osiris healed. In ancient Egypt the sky was represented by the goddess Nut arching her back over the earth so only her hands and feet touched the ground. Nut is the starry sky and gives birth to the Sun-god Ra every morning. In one myth Nut gives daily birth to the Sun-god who passes over her body until he reaches her mouth at sunset. He then passes into her mouth, flows through her body and is reborn the next morning. Another myth describes the sun as sailing up her legs and back in the Atet boat (*Matet*) until noon, when he enters the Sektet boat and continues his journey until sunset. As a goddess that gives birth to her son every morning, she is linked with the Underworld and resurrection; she is seen as a "friend" of the dead – a motherly guardian for those who travel through the Underworld. The goddess was often painted on the inside lid of the sarcophagus to protect the dead until the deceased could be reborn to a new life like Ra.



Akhet, hieroglyph for "horizon"

If there was the possibility of transferring a myth from one tradition to another, this ancient and wonderful story could be "translated" into the Venetic mythology as follows:

There were two Solar Boats and together they represented the goddess Reitia, the principle of cosmic order. The Morning Boat carried the Sun which took the form of Phaeton in the morning, of Helios at noon and of Apollo at dusk. After sunset Apollo travelled on the Evening Boat, which he had to protect from the perils of the Underworld and from Python "darkness and chaos", depicted as the cosmic snake. It so happened that one day Apollo threw a torch into Python's cave, lured out and killed the snake that had persecuted his mother Latona, while she was still pregnant with the god.

The Venetic version of the Egyptian myth just seems plausible. However, although we cannot entirely exclude that the Egyptian myth had reached Anatolia and hence Central-Eastern Europe, in reality we do not know if – and to which extent – the myth of the Solar Boat of the Urnfield culture resembled the Egyptian myth. Clear is, instead, the connection and the recurrence of transitions through the Underworld in the Apollonian myth. The fame of Orpheus, Apollo's initiate, is linked to the tragic story of the journey through the Underworld in search of his beloved Eurydice. Equipped with only a lyre and his enchanting voice, Orpheus had to overcome numerous obstacles.

Orpheus Rescuing Eurydice from the Underworld (detail of the ceiling), Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770)

His last obstacle was to pass through the cave of Tantalus, the Titan who had killed his son to feed the gods and who – like Indra in Hindu myths – had stolen the Ambrosia to give it to mortals. Tantalus had been condemned to a terrible punishment: he had to stand in a swamp, tied to a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he bent down to get a drink, the water receded before he could get any. Whenever he reached for the fruit, the branches raised his intended meal from his grasp. Tantalus pleaded Orpheus to play the lyre to stop the water and fruits. As Orpheus played, even Tantalus got stuck, and unable to feed himself his torment continued.

Persephone, the queen of the Underworld, was moved by Orpheus' song and, taking advantage of Hades' sleep, let Eurydice return to earth. A condition was imposed: Orpheus had to precede Eurydice all the way up to the door of Hades *without ever turning back*. On the threshold of the Underworld, believing they had already left the Kingdom of the dead, Orpheus was unable to withstand the doubts and broke his promise of *noli respicere post tergum*. Eurydice disappeared instantly and returned to the Darkness for eternity.

The Sun enters also the myth of the "disappearance" of young Persephone. Demeter looked for her daughter for nine days reaching the most remote regions, but only the tenth day – with the help of Helios – finally discovered that the kidnapper was Hades. The Etruscan god *Aplu* also had some infernal characteristics: he remembers the archaic Hittite name of Apollo (*Apaliunas*) and was crowned with a laurel wreath.

Another example about the Underworld comes from the Apollo's temple of the Cumaean Sibyl:

Deep in the face of that Euboean crag
A cavern vast is hollowed out amain,
With hundred openings, a hundred mouths,
Whence voices flow, the Sibyl's answering songs. *(Aeneid, VI, 42-44)*

Virgil narrates the descent of Aeneas to the Underworld. The hero arrives with his men on a hill overlooking Cuma and goes to the temple of Apollo built by Greek colonists (its remains are today still visible). Having found Sibyl's cave, the priestess tells him that it is time to consult Apollo, by whom she is inspired.

Four-faced Brahmā on a swan. Sanskrit "hamsa" roots relate to various species of swans (particularly mute swan), while some refer to geese.

The tradition based on the Vedas, the sacred Indian texts, is the world's oldest existing proof of the pursuit of Knowledge. In both the Vedas and Purânas the wild swan is a symbol of the soul. In Vedic philosophy the term Brahman connotes the highest Universal Principle, i.e., the Ultimate Reality in the Universe. Brahmā is the creator god in the Trimurthi of Hinduism, along with Vishnu and Shiva. The name Brahmā stems from the Sanskrit word *brih* which means 'to expand', a concept interestingly similar to the theory on the expansion of the universe established by modern physics. In this way, Brahmā became synonymous with Hiranyagharba: "Creation's Golden Egg".

One of the earliest iconographic descriptions of Brahmā is that of the four-faced God (like the four faces of Svantovit in the Wendi's culture) sitting on a swan, which stands for wisdom and spiritual discrimination.

Paramahamsa is a Sanskrit title of honour applied to Hindu spiritual teachers who are regarded as having attained Enlightenment. The title literally means 'the supreme swan'. It signifies one who is Awakened in all realms. The swan is equally at home on land and in water; similarly, the true sage is equally at home in the realms of matter and of spirit. To be in divine ecstasy and simultaneously to be actively wakeful is the *Paramahamsa* state: the "Royal Swan of the soul" floats in the cosmic ocean contemplating both its body and the cosmic ocean as manifestations of the same Spirit. *Paramahamsa* is the highest level of spiritual development in which the union with ultimate reality can been attained by a Hindu ascetic (*sannyasi*).

Meditation is the final door leading to inner Realization: through deep and constant meditation the mind is annihilated and the seeker reaches Beatitude. The yogin who has attained perfection keeps his identity with the Supreme Self while engaged in the world of perceptions, emotions and thoughts. He retains the concept of unity in diversity and is able to separate the pure unconditioned consciousness that underlies the world of names and forms. Likewise, in Hindu mysticism the swan has the unique ability to separate milk from water when mixed, seizing the pure milk in its essence beyond the water. In this context, the association of Brahmā with the wild swan acquires its full meaning.

Saraswati on the swan

Łada, goddess worshipped in Poland

Brahmā is also depicted as riding a chariot pulled by seven swans representing the seven worlds, like Apollo with the seven white swans. The swan goddess Saraswati 'the one who flows' is the guide of the Mahatmas of Shamballa, a hidden realm within Asia. She is the first of the three great goddesses of Hinduism, along with Lakshmi and Durga, and is the consort (or *shakti*) of Brahmā. In Hindu mythology, being Brahmā the god of Creation, he is credited with the generation of the *brahmānd* (universe) and all that exists therein. Because of that, Brahmā is one of the oldest gods and his cult – archaic and now submerged by other cults – has now fallen into disuse in India. Moreover Brahmā embodies the ring closer to the core of the Vedic cult of Indra, Agni and Durga: the gods that emerged from the ancestral homeland of the Indo-Europeans. The *Indo-Iranian Urheimat*, located east of the Caspian Sea, was identified by Anatole Klyosov with the culture of Andronovo (2000–1200 BC), regarded as the culture which gave rise to the Indo-Aryans.

In the West, Apollo is seen as the God of harmony and discriminating beauty of the symmetric systems. When *Leto* (Latona) gave birth to Apollo on the island of Delos, the place was surrounded by a flock of swans. The parallel of *Leto*, in the myth of Zeus' coupling with the swan is *Leda* – *Lada* meaning 'woman' among the Lycians. Among the Etruscans there was *Letun*, the mother of Aplu (Apollo). The Slavic goddess *Łada* is depicted as a white swan and is the wife of the sun god Svarog (the Iranian word *xwar* means 'Sun'). *Łada* is one of the four deities that Lucas from Great Kozmin, from the University of Krakow mentioned in ca. 1405-1412 as having been worshipped in Poland. Boris Rybakov also compared Dažbog, the son of *Łada*, to Apollo.

THE TITANS AND NATIVE FAITH

Hesiod, active between 750 and 650 BC, declares in his *Theogony* that the Titans are the most ancient gods (*prótheroi theoî*), born before the Olympians. It is difficult to identify the age and area in which the religion of the Titans developed and spread. The epic Hittite cycle matches the Hesiodic myth of the Titans Kronos and Uranus: it tells how the heavenly sovereignty went to Anu and then to Kumarbi, who bit off Anu's genitals. However, Anu raised upon him the storm bull-god Teshub (Tarhun) who managed to deprive him of his reign. In the Phrygian era, the myth was reversed: Pelops was cut into pieces by his father Tantalus, who is often associated with the Titans because of his tragic fate. Phoibe and Cèo (Coio) generated the sweet Letó (Λητώ): Latona "with the blue robe". Letó is among the few Titans who in historical times retained their own worship and temples, such as the *Letoon* in Delos. As the mother of Apollo and Artemis, Latona is the link that the Apollonian worship derived from that of the Titans; she also establishes a certain association between the Hyperboreans and the Titans. Pausanias attributes to the Titan Crio the paternity of Python, the serpent killed by Apollo. The connection between the Apollonian cult and the Titans is then strengthened by Orphism, which adds hymns dedicated to the Titans and Rhea to the cult of Apollo celebrated by Orpheus.

A book that deals with "Venetic Mythology" does not yet exist on the market. The text books used in Italian universities (where to this day there is no specific course on the ancient Veneti and where dissertations on this topic are not recommended owing to a lack of mentors) merely list the various Venetic deities without considering the relationships among them: no effort is made to identify an ensemble of stories, myths and legends and include them in an organic system, that is, there is no all-encompassing collection of the myths related to the Venetic culture in ancient times. Not to mention textbooks in which Greek and Roman mythology is amply addressed while the ancient Veneti are not even mentioned and are thus unknown to young students from Veneto. Does this mean that Venetic mythology has never existed or has it simply been lost? It is clear that, in the early centuries, the Christianization of the *Venetia* led to the deliberate destruction of all forms of oral and written tradition that had to do with pagan worship. Was the memory forever deleted? Perhaps one day science will prove that the memory of salient facts – intended as historical memory – is transmitted through DNA and is passed down from father to son. If we turn down the narrow view of local archaeologists and broaden our horizons, with a little effort, interesting ideas may come to light. The use of a method based on a "Venetic point of view" allows us to see aspects that are not perceptible from other points of view.

We begin our journey into Venetic Mythology from very far away: from the Titan Tantalus. His father Tmolus – crowned with oak leaves – reigned over Lydia and judged the musical contest between Pan and Apollo. Some tell that Tantalus moved from Lydia to the north and reigned over Paphlagonia, on the shores of the Black Sea. Tantalus met with the wrath of the gods both because of the crime he committed against his own son Pelops and because of the offense against Apollo committed by his daughter Niobe, whose children were murdered by Apollo's arrows.

According to some authors the Phrygian Ilus, founder of Troy, fought against Tantalus because he "enticed and kidnapped" his brother Ganymede. The battle between the two armies was long and uncertain and a large number of warriors fell on both sides, until Tantalus was banished from Paphlagonia. Ilus also banished Pelops, the son of Tantalus, who – after being sent away from Paphlagonia by the barbarians – had retired on Mount Sipylus in Lydia, his ancestral homeland. The plot of the "amorous homosexual kidnapping" and the war against the ancestors of the Trojans, states a thematic and epic nucleus which will be later mimicked by Homer in the *Iliad*, which means "Song of Ilion". Given that Paphlagonia is mentioned in the first epic poem that revolves around the war against Troy, can it be that the Veneti themselves were somehow involved? The Veneti come into play since Paphlagonia, ruled by Tantalus and Pelops, was their land near the Black Sea and Pelops was their king in the city of Enete. *The Iliad, in its great heterogeneity, could be the elaboration of this first epic tradition concerning the Anatolian Veneti led by Tantalus and Pelops against the Trojan Ilus; it would thus fully fall into the Venetic cultural heritage.* Any doubts? Agamemnon belonged to the Pelopid dynasty and Pelops was his grandfather; Pelops was also the name of one of Agamemnon's sons. The city of Argos – where Agamemnon reigned – was in the Peloponnese, which in turn took its name from Pelops when he reached it after having been expelled from Lydia.

Roman syncretism associated Reitia with the goddess Minerva/Athena. The most common epithet for Athena was "Pallas Athena", but Pallas was also a Titan, guardian of wisdom, perhaps absorbed into the cult of the new goddess. The "Palladius" – a female statue with joined feet, a spear in her right hand and a spindle and distaff in her left hand – fell from the sky at the very moment in which Ilus founded Troy and was therefore closely guarded within the city. It was three cubits high (a cubit is 44.4 cm) and many copies were carved by the Trojans so that no one knew which was the real one: from its possession depended the safety of the city. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus came to know about the oracle and sneaked inside the walls disguised as a beggar, with his features deformed by beatings. Overwhelmed by nostalgia for Greece, Helen provides Odysseus with accurate directions to get hold of the original Palladius: the smallest. At the time when Pallas was a Titan, the statue was made of dolphin ivory and carved in the bones of Pelops. Reitia is a weaver goddess like Athena and the name Palladius has the same root of Pala, the town of Paphlagonia which preserves the oldest linguistic evidence in Anatolia (2nd millennium BC).

The cult centres of Apollo in Greece – Delphi and Delos – date back to the 8th century BC, as does the colonization of the Black Sea coasts. Who were the colonisers that worshiped Apollo, the "founder of cities", and where did they come from? The typical pattern with which this cult spread suggests that the colonisers were accustomed to navigation and to travelling great distances. The name of Latona, mother of Apollo, originated in Lydia. East of the Luwian language area, the Hurrian god *Aplu* either brought or protected, if propitiated, from the plague and that resembled the Apollo Smintheus ('mouse Apollo') worshipped at Troy. *Apaliunas* is a theonym attested in a Hittite language treaty as a tutelary of Wilusa (that is the Troad). *Apaliunas* is considered to be the Hittite reflex of **Apeljōn*, an early form of the name Apollo. *Apaliunas* is among the

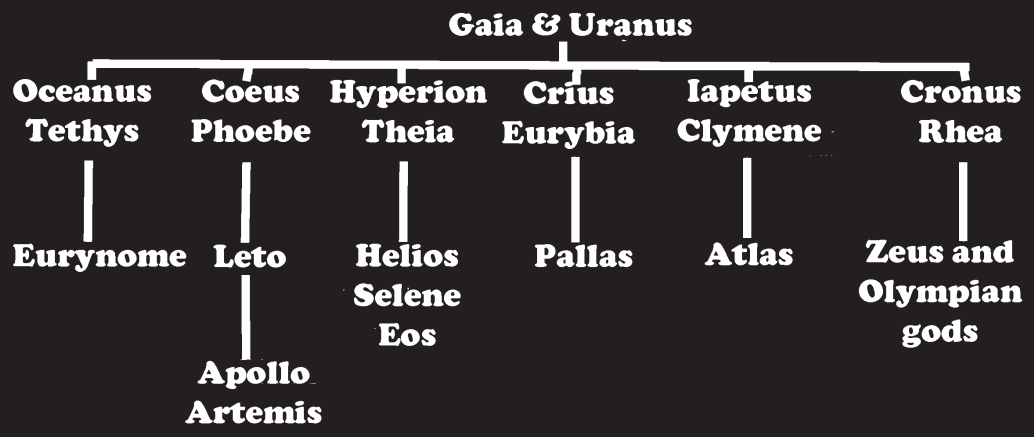
gods who guaranteed a treaty drawn up about 1280 BC between Alaksandu of Wilusa, interpreted as "Alexander of Ilios", and the great Hittite king Muwatalli II.

It is likely that in the beginning Apollo was not at all a "sun god", but a god who could bring plague (*loimós*). The first lines of the *Iliad* show a tragic scene in which a cruel evil kills dogs, mules and people: hundreds of funeral pyres burn relentlessly. Pestilence, disease and disasters mark the wrath of Apollo when it comes down like darkness and his arrows hiss when he lets them fly against the Achaeans lined up in front of Troy. In contrast, when the god protects from epidemics, he is seen as the "Physician Apollo", who has the power to heal through oracles. When there is disease or famine in a city, a goat kid is sacrificed outside the city doors in honour of *Apollon Apotrópaios*.

As for the Apollonian cult, the problem of establishing origins and attribution to a specific ethnic group also applies to the cult of the Titans. Strangely, there is some convergence between the Apollonian cult and the sparse information about the Titans cult:

- in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, the serpent Python is confused with Typhoon, a Titan. Typhoon was raised by another monster who rebelled against the gods, Delphyne, the dragoness appointed to guard the oracle of Delphi.
- Latona, mother of Apollo, is the daughter of the Titan Ceo (Coio)
- in Orphism, a cult that originated in Greece in the 6th cent. BC around the figure of Orpheus, the Titans have great relevance. Dionysus, also called Zagreus, is devoured by the Titans, but Zeus hurls a thunderbolt at them thus leading to the rise of the human race.
- Themis, the Titaness, was present at Delos to witness the birth of Apollo
- according to Ovid, it was Themis rather than Zeus who told Deucalion to throw the bones of "his Mother" over his shoulder to create a new humankind after the deluge
- the Titaness Phoebe, whose name comes from "bright and shining", was said to have founded the oracle of Delphi
- the Titaness Thyia was said to have been loved by Apollo and to have borne him Delphos, the eponymous founder of the town Delphi
- the Titan Hyperion fathered Helios (sun), Selene (moon) and Eos (dawn)
- the Oceanid Clymene, wife of Helios, is the Titaness mother of Phaeton. According to Hesiod, the River Eridanos is the son of Thetys and of Oceanus, principle of all things.
- Boreas, the North Wind, was the son of the Titan Astraeus and of Eos, the dawn goddess
- according to Hesiod, Hestia – whose Roman equivalent is Vesta – is the first-born daughter of the two Titans Kronos and Rhea and the eldest of the female Olympian gods. Hestia rejects Apollo and commits to perpetual virginity.

Aeschylus, Hesychius and Photius called the Adriatic Sea "The Gulf of Rhea". In the Hellenistic age Apollonius of Rhodes (Argonautica I, 503-506) has Orpheus tell us how, before Kronos and Rhea, the Titans were subjected to the sea serpent Ophion and the Oceanid Eurynome. The Creation couple Eurynome-Ophion ruled Olympus but, having lost their power because of Kronos and Rhea, were thrown into the ocean. In this pre-Greek setting, Eurynome – who dances naked on the surface of the water – is the goddess of Creation in the religion of the Titans; only the coming of the Mother goddess Rhea would start the second generation of gods, the Olympians, which were essentially Greek.



Outside of Rome, evidence of the worship of Saturn (Kronos) gathers around Verona, Trentino and Alto Adige regions: this takes on even more importance given that such worship was not very common outside of Italy. Saturn was worshiped in Verona, in a temple on Mount St. Peter and also – a holy site of major interest – at the mouth of river Timavo (Duino). Close to Mestre, in Altino, there was the cult of Ops, identified with Rhea. In Val di Non (province of Trento) the inscription of Vervò puts Saturn in a pantheon of six planetary gods which states the addition of the cult of the Titans in astronomical concepts similar to those in ancient Babylonian and Palestinian astrology. The link between Saturn and the Pelasgians proves in turn the venerable antiquity of this cult, which cannot have simply been passed on to the Veneti by the Romans.

How does the cult of Apollo and the Titans intertwine with the origin of the ancient Veneti? Tmolus, father of the Titan Tantalus, raped the chaste priestess Arippe in the temple of Artemis, sister of Apollo. Essential is the tale of Tmolus attending the musical contest between Pan and Apollo: Tmolus, Sipylo and Chthonia's son and husband of Pluto, goes back to at least three generations before the Trojan war, because the bone of his nephew Pelops was quoted in the *Iliad* as the mysterious object to find so that the city would fall (Trojan War was about 1250 BC). Counting 25 years per generation, we get to 1325 BC, when the Urnfield culture in Europe began.

By Mount Tmolus – a Lydian massif south of Sardis (today Bozdoğan) – the local god Tmolus was linked to King Midas, a much later Phrygian character. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

it happened one day that the god Pan was playing on Mount Tmolus. Carried away by his flute's sweet notes, Pan dared to challenge Apollo saying that the god's melodies could not compete with the notes of his multiple pipes. Apollo then came down from Olympus to compete with Pan, inviting Tmolus – the god of the mountain – to act as a judge to the challenge.

Pan played first but when Apollo began to touch the lyre everything seemed to stop at his notes, so that Tmolus unhesitatingly declared him the winner and Pan bowed to such grace and harmony. Only Midas, who happened to be passing by and had attended the exhibition, started to protest, saying that Pan had to be the winner. Apollo, to punish Midas for his arrogance, decided to turn his ears into those of an ass.

Apollo's involvement in building the walls of Troy and thus its foundation, reiterates the antiquity of his cult. As for any other historical phenomenon, to locate the origins of a myth it is necessary to trace the oldest date of its appearance. Therefore, the data relating to Tmolus – with the limits concerning a mythological story – would testify that the Apollonian cult originated in Anatolia and was linked to the Pelopid lineage. From Anatolia, Apollo reached the Baltic Sea. The Hittites did not expand in Central and Eastern Europe; the Veneti, on the other hand, had a northern "Hyperborean" counterpart, where the North Wind (precisely Borea) blows. The Phrygians – Herodotus tells us – lived in the Southern Balkans before migrating southward. The Pelopids were not Hittites; instead they were quite similar to the Phrygians and sometimes confused with them.

Many people worshiped Apollo, initially as a salutary god. Among them there were the Veneti of the Adriatic, for whom his worship (in terms of importance and spread) was second only to that of Reitia. This is confirmed by the temple of Apono (Apollo) in Abano Terme, which dates back to the 1st century BC, and by the discovery of various statues of Apollo, like the votive offering of Lagole (Calalzo di Cadore), dated to the 2nd century BC. Before then, in the 5th century when Apollo was turned into a sun god, there was his sanctuary in Adria. Further south, Spina was founded in the 6th century BC and had – according to tradition – a Pelasgian origin, while other sources credited the hero Diomedes with its foundation when he returned from Troy. In the Etruscan emporium of Spina, where amber and Venetic horses were traded, Venetic dedications and inscriptions attesting the cult of Apollo were found; so deep was the cult that its inhabitants consecrated a treasure to him in the sanctuary of Delphi – as reported by Strabo, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Pliny and Polemon. In historical essays containing the refrain "the ancient Veneti who laid flat breads in the fields as an offer to the crows" it is often overlooked that the raven was the bird sacred to Apollo and that Apollo was associated with prophecy; a propitious sign was when the raven would eat the offerings. Another bird sacred to Apollo was the swan, and the *pair* of swans is linked to the religious motif of the Solar Boat:

Pelopes, son of Tantalus

Cycnus, a son of Apollo, threw himself into a lake which became known as Cycnean lake; his mother Hyrie did the same and Apollo changed them both into swans.

The scarce information we have about the cult of the Titans should be taken cautiously and filtered because it came to us through Greek sources that changed, adapted and demonised the Titans as belonging to an earlier religion in competition with the Olympic gods, led by Zeus. The resulting stories mix them with Zeus who always appears as the undisputed winner, the rapist of goddesses and the one who always has a central role.

That said, we discover that "Sea of Kronos" was the ancient name of the Adriatic Sea by the *Caput Adriae* (mouth of River Timavo), as there indeed stood the cult of Saturn, i.e. Kronos. The gulf mentioned by the Sea of Kronos was one of the seas traversed by the Argonauts in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. At their southern and northern ends the amber road and the tin road led to a sea with the same name, *Pontos Kronios*, as if indeed they defined and identified the beginning and end of the Venetic trade routes. Plutarch, who lived between the 1st and 2nd cent. BC mentions an "Isle of Kronos" in the Atlantic Ocean: there the god defeated by his son Zeus would be imprisoned. In *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882) Ignatius Donnelly reports that the Romans called the Atlantic "Sea of Kronos". Moreover, *Cronium* ('Cronio') was the sea of ice, as Pliny called it.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that a river called Tartarus flows into the upper Adriatic. At times it flows underground, sombre and dark through the woods and swamps; it crosses the territory of Verona in a lazy and willowy way because of the large number of algae that clutters its bed and, finally, ploughs the Lower Po Valley to Adria. The name of the river Tartarus reminds us of the place in the Underworld where Kronos and Iapetus were. The legend of the castration of Kronos is set in the Ionian Sea, in Corcyra, that took the name Drepana – from the sickle used for emasculation – and is located in the Adriatic Sea, which the Euboeans call both Sea of Kronos and Gulf of Rhea (the name of Kronos' wife was interchangeable with and allusive to that of her husband). Rhea is one of the Titanides generated by Uranus (the Sky) and Gaia (the Earth). The worship of Gaia was established in Apollonia, modern-day Pojani in Albania, which again suggests a link between Apollo and the Titans: precisely in the town of Apollonia there is a monastery that is said to have been built on the ruins of a temple of Apollo.

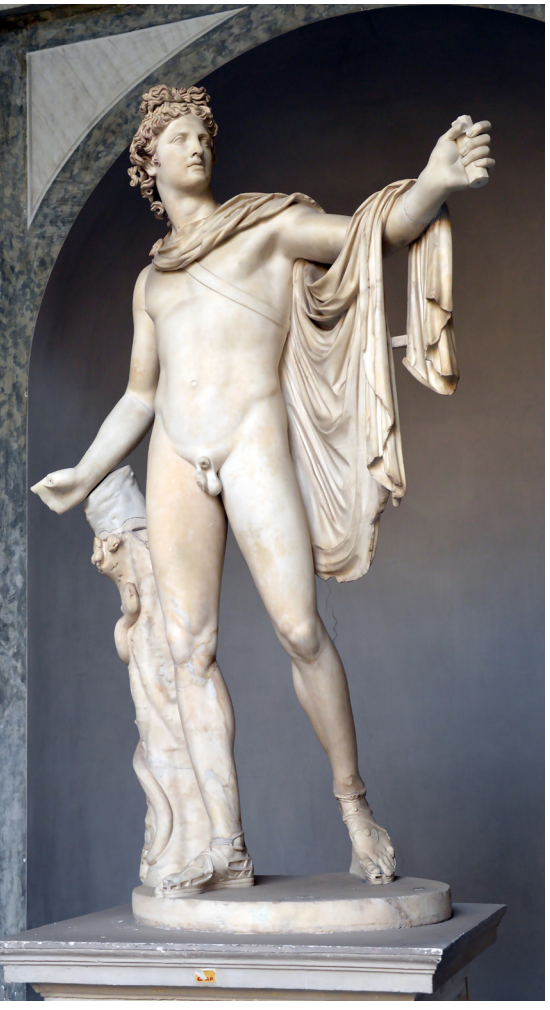
Was the cult of the Titans the religion of the Urnfield culture? It remains a fascinating hypothesis. The Titaness Rhea resumes the concept of the *Mater Deorum* which began with Gaia and takes the maternal figure back to a primeval sacred level. In a context in which the cult of the Titans is blended with the Apollonian cult, it is easier to understand that the goddess of the Veneti, Reitia, is simply the local version of the goddess Rhea. Who was the local version of Apollo? At the end of the 14th century Raffaele da Verona wrote that halfway between Verona and Ferrara there was the forest of Carpanea, an area that – as revealed by numerous clues – had been previously occupied by a city. Legend has it that the last king of Carpanea, having outraged the god Appo, was dethroned by the priests and held captive in a cellar. The god Appo is simply Apono, that is, Apollo.

Mastrocinque believes that Heracles certainly belonged to the Venetic deities. Numerous bronze statuettes document the cult of Heracles in the *Veneti*a, which dates back to the 6th century and foreruns Romanization. Heracles was a traveller hero; after much wandering he passed by the Eridanus (River Po), where the river nymphs advised him to turn to Nereus, son of Gaia and Pontus, to know the location of the Garden of the Hesperides. Ladon was the dragon in charge of defending the tree of the Hesperides, which – according to some interpretations – was located in the land of the Hyperboreans, on the slopes of Mount Atlas and where the horses of the Sun ended their race. It seems that the *Via Heracleia* from the *Venetia* may have gone up to France, while the Garden of the Hesperides – the westernmost stage of Heracles' eleventh labour (golden apples of the Hesperides) – may have simply been the myth that then evolved into the isle of Avalon, the "isle of fruit trees". As a matter of fact, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where the legend of the Hesperides is mentioned for the first time, the Hesperides guard the golden apples in a far western corner of the world, where day and night meet on an island in the Ocean. In other versions, the lineage of the Hesperides as "daughters of the Titan Atlas or the Titaness Themis" falls within the sphere of the Titans. Both Prometheus and Atlas are sons of the Titan Iapetus: to find the Garden of the Hesperides, Heracles uses Prometheus' directions and while Atlas picks the apples, the hero holds up the sky for him. As always victorious, Heracles brings the apples to Tartarus inside a horn.

The Garden of the Hesperides, Frederic Leighton, 1892

Heracles was also revered in Abano, the renowned area of hot springs known since the 6th cent. BC (current town of Montegrotto Terme, near Padua). While on his way west on the *Via Heracleia*, Heracles passed through Abano – where there was the oracle of Geryon and the golden dice were cast into the fountain to know the future. Geryon had three heads: another three-headed deity, "Trumusiate", is worshipped near the health-giving waters of the sanctuary of Lagole (Calalzo di Cadore), a site also linked to the cult of Apollo. The archbishop Ebbo (ca. 775 - 851) wrote of the three heads of Triglav which were believed to represent the Sky, the Earth and the Underworld – the three kingdoms ruled by the god. On top of the three heads were three tiaras and a golden veil hung from them, covering the eyes and lips of the god so that he could not see the sins of humans, nor talk with them. The oldest information about the Triglav cult, as deity, is in the biography of *Monk Priefligensis* from the *Prieflingen monastery* who recorded the destruction of the Triglav idol in Szczecin (Poland) in 1127. As *summus deus*, Triglav was worshipped in Wolin and Branderburg and the oracular ritual included the use of a black horse, like in the ceremony dedicated to Svantevit in the temple of Arkona (isle of Rugia, Pomerania).

Heracles long chased the "Ceryneian Hind" up to the Baltic. In his desire not to kill or wound her, Heracles then walked for a full year through Istria up to the land of the Hyperboreans. When the exhausted animal took refuge on Mount Artemision and approached the River Ladon to drink, Heracles drew his bow and shot an arrow through her forelegs, hitting her between the bone and the tendon without shedding a drop of blood.



Apollo of Belvedere, ca. 350 BC

Apollon Patroos is the "Apollo of the Fathers". Who were those ancient fathers? The answer is easy: Apollo is the god of the Hyperboreans. Griffins were sacred to Apollo and it is possible that the winged lion, symbol of the Serenissima, had been passed down to the Venetic tradition by the priests of Apollo during the time of the Hyperboreans. In the collective imagination, the Hyperboreans are a fictional population, created by the fertile imagination of the Greek mythographers. Instead, the Hyperboreans may have really existed. In Delo, inventories of the temple of Apollo report the offerings of the Hyperboreans to the 3rd century BC and mention the welcome given to those who brought them. Imaginary people cannot bring gifts, of course. We undoubtedly know that the offerings in Delo were intended for Artemis, lovingly carried by the Hyperborean maidens named Arge, Opis, Hyperokhe and Laodike. We do not know for sure what those offerings wrapped in straw were; we cannot exclude that in the ancient period, those gifts consisted in amber: the Baltic amber, the most precious gift that could be offered to the gods, namely the thousand gems shed as tears by Apollo when he reached the land of the Hyperboreans.

Hyperborean means "beyond Boreas", who was the North Wind blowing over the mountains of Thrace, son of Eos and the Titan Astraeus. The Rhodopes Mountains separated Greek Thrace from Bulgarian Thrace. However, classical authors provided different and inaccurate information on the exact location of the land of the Hyperboreans and a multitude of scholars unsuccessfully tried to interpret that information to locate where *Hyperborea* was. So let's turn the question around: who were the Hyperboreans? If we can prove who they were, we can locate their settlement. They were not one of the tribes already named by the ancients; nor were they the Celts, which the Greeks called Κελτοί since the 6th century BC referring to the people living in the "ancient La Tène" (upper Rhine and Danube). The first written record about the Hyperboreans dates back to the 6th century BC: *Hecataeus of Miletus* mentions the existence of the Hyperboreans in the far north, between the Ocean and the Riphean Mountains (probably present-day Carpathian Mountains). Looking north from *Miletus*, the valley "between the Ocean and the Mountains" is the Polish plain.

According to Ptolemy, the Riphean Mountains were the divide between the Baltic Sea and the Euxine Sea; therefore – in agreement with Hecataeus of Miletus' localization – both Ptolemy and the geographer Marcian of Heraclea (Heraclea Pontica) place *Hyperborea* in the North Sea, which they call "Hyperborean Ocean".

Map of Herodotus with the Hyperboreans. Herodotus' ecumene places the settlements of the Hyperboreans in the Baltic area.

In the *Argonautica Orphica*, the ship Argo lands in the Hyperborean Ocean. Which was the route chosen by the Argonauts to reach it? In the Greek view, the Adriatic Sea opposite the city of Adria – or *Sea of Kronos* – led to the northern lands of the Hyperboreans. The area of *Caput Adriae*, near the mouth of the River Timavo, was thus conceived as the passageway to a sea called by the Hyperboreans with the same name as the Adriatic was, that is, the *Sea of Kronos*.

But after the tenth birth of Dawn,
who brings light to men, we landed
at the Rhipaean hills. From here, the Argo
made advances by leaps and jumps through the narrow strait,
and fell into the Ocean, which the Hyperborean men
call the Cronian Sea or the Dead Sea. *(Argonautica Orphica)*

In the far north the *Sea of Kronos* overlooked the shores of the Arimaspians' territory and according to Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484 - 425 BC) – who quotes a poem on the Arimaspians by Aristeas of Proconnesus – this tribe's territory bordered exactly with the territory of the Hyperboreans, the only people "who do not assault their neighbours".

There are many versions of the myth of the Titan Phaeton, the inexpert son of Helios, who fell into the River Eridanus with his father's chariot. Herodotus knew about the tradition that bounded amber to the Eridanus "the river that flows into the Boreal Sea". The most ancient quote is however that of Hesiod (8th century BC). In his *Theogony*, the first cosmogonic Greek poem, Hesiod presents Phaeton as the son of the Titaness Eos, the dawn. Then the young was kidnapped by Aphrodite who leads him to her temple and designates Phaeton as the guardian of the shrine:

Phaethon exalted hero, a mortal resembling the gods, whom,
when he was a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth
with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up
and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit.

According to Hesiod, Phaethon was chosen by Venus as the "nocturnal" minister of her temples; while, according to Pythagoras, a cataclysm generated by Phaethon's chariot moved a star that gave birth to the Milky Way. The connection with the morning star Venus is reminiscent of the eastern myth of Lucifer, the rebel angel who fell from Heaven. In the Canaanite tradition, the morning star is embodied by an astral lion (called Ashtar), who challenges the god of the skies and is put to death by his emissary. Attilio Mastrocinque hypothesizes a possible Hesiodic origin for a passage from an Egyptian papyrus known as the *Catalogue of Women*, where the first link between Eridanus, amber and the Hyperboreans is established.

Phaethon and Apollo, Giambattista Tiepolo, 1736

The myth of Eridanus in Ovid took inspiration from the Greek tragedies of the 5th century BC:

Having doubts about his father's true identity, the young Phaethon went to Helios (the Sun) in order to obtain proof of his paternity. He thus asked Helios to let him drive the sun chariot. Reluctantly Helios accepted and warned Phaethon of the dangers. Phaethon undauntedly drove the chariot through the skies spurring the winged horses, but the creatures refused to obey the insecure orders of the young driver and carried the chariot off route: they flew northwards, warming up those lands until they melted the ice, then they moved to the south coming dangerously close to the ground and burning down woods and draining the rivers.

The Earth complained because the world was sadly returning to original chaos and so Zeus struck the unlucky charioteer with a thunderbolt. Phaethon fell out of the sky like a falling star with his hair on fire. The body of the young Titan tumbled into the river Eridanus, where he was mourned by his friend Cygnus and by his sisters – the Heliadae – who turned themselves into poplar trees dripping with amber tears.

The metamorphosis into poplars of Phaethon's sisters (Heliadae), painting by Santi di Tito, 16th century

Mastrocinque observes that the theme of Phaethon's sisters, the Heliadae, is mingled with that of the Hesperides. Aigle (or Aegle, "dazzling light") is the name of both one of the Heliadae and one of the Hesperides. The three Hesperides are also represented in tears as they mourn the death of the dragon Ladon, the guardian of their garden who was killed by Heracles. Like the Heliadae who turned themselves into poplar trees, the Hesperides also transformed themselves into a poplar, an elm and a willow. As Pherecydes tells us, the Hesperides, who lived in a cave by the River Po, told Heracles to ask Nereus for the golden apples. The garden of the Hesperides was in the land of the Hyperboreans, the place Heracles was directed toward in search of the golden apples and the Ceryneian Hind, disputed with Apollo. According to tradition, Heracles really did reach the land of the Hyperboreans and also had affairs with Hyperborean women. Ovid told that Phaethon was buried by the Naiads, called Hesperies, which means 'from the West'. Nymphs of waters and fountains, the Naiads could have survived as "Anguane" in the folk legends of the mountains of Friuli and Veneto (a topic fully developed in the book *Agane - Fate d'acqua* by Barbara Bacchetti, with amazing photos by Elido Turco).

Which of the western-most rivers (considering their geographical position) did the Greeks refer to when they used the name "Eridanus"? If we can figure this out, it will be easier to solve the mystery of the identification of the Hyperboreans, because – as aforesaid – Eridanus, amber and the Hyperboreans were intricately linked. Ancient writers identified the River Po delta (in Italian Polesine) as the setting not only for the Phaethon myth but also for other tales such as those of the Elektrides, of Meleager's sisters, of Icarus and Daedalus and of Heracles' return from the land of the Hyperboreans. Strabo, Apollonius of Rhodes, Pliny the Elder, Stephanus of Byzantium, the Pseudo-Aristotle and the Pseudo-Scylax of Caryanda all report that by the mouth of the Po River there

were the *amber islands* called Elektrides. According to an ancient annotator of Hesiod, these islands were governed by Circe and Ulysses. Today these islands belong to the mainland, but in former times there were high sandbanks of coastal dunes from Ravenna to the Lido of Venice. In some areas these coasts formed elongated islands that were visited by the Veneti, the Etruscans and the Greeks. Due to the rising of the ground by the delta in the Polesine region, the coastal dunes shifted eastward during the Roman Age and turned into a flat marshland surrounding the city of Adria.

In Euripides, the Eridanus is situated on the Adriatic shore and the Argonauts sailed toward the River Eridanus from the High Adriatic after having reached the Timavo River, where a horse of the Dioscuri had stopped to drink water. In the 8th century BC Eumelus of Corinth believed that Absyrtus, brother of Medea and nephew of Helios, had been called Phaethon. Eridanus would thus be the River Po, the *fluviorum rex* described by Virgil, which was really linked with the amber manufacturing and trade ever since the Proto-Venetic culture of Frattesina, near present-day Fratta Polesine in the lower Po (Rovigo). The village of Frattesina – an important centre for the manufacturing of glass, bones, horns, bronze and ceramic – flourished between the 12th and 10th centuries BC, long before the Etruscans spread in the Po Valley. The first intensive settlement by the Etruscans in the area dates back to the 6th century BC. If the Etruscans were the most important manufacturers of amber jewels and sculptures and also great buyers of this product, they do not seem to have been the creators of Phaethon's myth (despite they too celebrated Phaethon, the myth of the Hesperides and the Ceryneian Hind) since his name had already been mentioned by Hesiod at the end of the 8th century BC. If the papyrus known as *Catalogue of Women* – where Eridanus, amber and the Hyperboreans appear together for the first time – has an Hesiodic origin, as Attilio Mastrocinque believes, it means that two centuries divide the myth of Eridanus from the great Etruscan colonization in the Po Valley. Although merchants from Corinth, Corfu and Phocaea resumed business in the emporiums of the Adriatic Sea during the 8th and 7th centuries BC and although the Greeks from Asia Minor sailed the Adriatic during the 6th century BC, after the 6th century the Greeks decreased the importation of amber because they had replaced it with gold to build statues. Therefore, the development of the Etruscan civilization by the Po coincided with the downfall of the trade with the Greeks.

On the contrary the ambers found in the graves of Este and Padua, as well as in Slovenia (Vinica and Santa Lucia di Tolmino), show us that amber arrived in the High Adriatic a century before the Etruscan development: this suggests that the Veneti may have changed buyers and transferred the amber trade from overseas to the Peninsula, that is, from the Greeks to the Etruscans. In lower Etruria amber probably arrived by sea from the High Adriatic, passing through Verrucchio (near Rimini) which was the main break point. A commercial route by land connected Este and Padua to Bologna, supplying the city with amber from the centres of the High Adriatic. There was also an itinerary by river that connected Padua to Bologna along a southern deltaic branch of the Po, which correspond with today's Reno, called Age *Padusa* by Pliny and *Padòa* by Polybius during the Roman Age. In ancient times the importance of this trade route could have led to the identification of this deltaic branch with the mythical Eridanus.

At the end of the Bronze Age, in the 10th century BC, the coast of the High Adriatic was almost straight and the sand bar passed not far from Adria. The Po ran off and ultimately made its way to the sea through two main branches: the Po of Adria and the Po of Spina. The rival city of Spina was subjected to Etruscan influence, whereas the Veneti built pile-dwelling buildings on the marshy grounds of Adria: the first traces of this settlement date back to the age between the 10th and 6th centuries BC. The branch of the so-called "Po of Adria" was mentioned by ancient Greek geographers like Hecataeus, Theopompus and Ptolemy. Hecataeus suggests that the Adriatic Sea and the city of Adria took their names from this branch of the ancient delta. Adria, the place where Aeschylus situated the mourning ground for Phaethon and where little amber ducks and ram heads were found, may represent the Venetic heritage of Frattesina.

It is obvious that what the Aegean merchants were looking for in Adria was the Baltic amber, which they probably bartered with precious vases. Ancient amber was mainly found in Aegean sanctuaries, like the Artemision at Ephesus (amber was sacred to Artemis). The electrostatic proprieties of amber to attract small scraps made it a perfect material for amulets, while the belief about its curative powers increased its fame. Amber beads of the kind of Tiryns were produced in the Polesine area, certainly also in Campestrin of Grignano. Frattesina was the most important production centre outside the Baltic area and the *Venetia* region was the commercial junction between the amber route and the Aegean already in the previous Mycenaean Age, between 1150 and 1050 BC. Probably the Proto-Veneti of the Po delta area were able to supply themselves with amber without the aid of the Mycenaeans. It is commonly believed that one of the main routes for the amber trade passed through the High Adriatic and reached the Greek and Italic markets. Amber reached the *Venetia* through the Resia Pass and Val d'Adige well before the age of Frattesina, i.e., during the local Polada culture (2200-1600 BC). The navigation within the lagoon connected Adria to Este, its future heir placed along the Adige River. In the following period well-known were, above all, the ambers from the city of Este, which soon established relations with the similar Venetic people of the Upper Isonzo River settled in Santa Lucia of Tolmino, a demographically big centre of Western Slovenia equally rich in amber.

According to the short Alexandrine work *Admirable narrations*, the people from the *Venetia* gathered amber to supply the Greeks: if it were so, not the Greeks travelled along the amber route but rather the Veneti, who brought the precious stones directly to them. By the mid-5th century BC, Herodotus was still very doubtful about the location of the Eridanus. The Greeks did not know the amber route exactly. Only at the end of the 4th century BC, Pytheas of Massalia took a long journey to the North Sea and discovered the real origin of amber: the shores of Abalus, the Baltic island which can be identified with the Baunonia of Pliny the Elder and the modern peninsula of Samland (Vistula lagoon). It was however a journey by sea, so that the mainland way still remained unknown to the Greeks during Pytheas' time. Lucian of Samosata, who lived in Athens in the following century, reported an anecdote that revealed his disappointment when he went to the bank of the Po and asked the boatmen about the river's poplars that distilled the precious amber.

The boatmen started laughing in Lucian's face and answered: "Do you think that we would row all day long for a paltry amount if we could get rich with the Po amber?". The ancient merchants from the *Venetia* were well-known for being cunning (they, for example, never sold their female horses so as to prevent others from reproducing their breed and stealing their monopoly), so it is plausible that they jealously guarded the routes leading to the amber and concealed them from their Greek buyers.

It was only in the 1st century AD that the Roman scientist Pliny, with great shrewdness, proved his precise ideas about the nature and origin of amber gems: "It is certain that amber originates in the islands of the northern Ocean and is called *gleso* by the Germans. […] Amber comes from the sap of a certain kind of pine as resin leaks out for excess of liquid. […] Even our ancestors knew that it was tree sap and called it *succinum*". Pliny highlighted the role of the Veneti in the amber trade in an era when the expansion of the Germanic people had stolen their monopoly: "The Germans brought amber from Pannonia and from there the Veneti, who were close to both Pannonia and the Adriatic Sea, spread it and made it become famous". Pliny is very precise in localizing the place of amber deposits when he calculates a distance of around 560 miles between *Carnuntum*, in Pannonia, to the shores where amber is gathered: it corresponds to the mouth of the Vistula River. Tacitus documented that the Aesti explored the Baltic Sea looking for amber. Significantly, we find the Aesti at the extreme north of the amber route and, in the *Venetia*, the city of "Este" at the south end of the route – an assonance and similarity which also applies to the Sea of Kronos as seen before.

In the Roman Age amber travelled from the mouth of the Vistula, along the river and through the Warta and its tributary Prosna, to the Oder (in Silesia); from there it moved along the Morava River (in the region of Moravia) down to the Danube, where, at the confluence of the two rivers, there was *Carnuntum*. Finally, it reached *Emona* (Ljubljana) and the endpoint Aquileia through the Roman road system that ran along the border between Noricum and Pannonia.

In Herodotus' opinion, Eridanus was a Greek name because *Eridanos* was also the name of a small river in Athens. However, there was also a river called *Erétainos* near Vicenza, *Reteno* was the name of the Retrone-Bacchiglione and the name of the ancient Medoacus (Brenta River) may have been *Erétainos*. *Bedenkos* or *Bodinco* was the name given to the Eridanus by the Veneti. Servius and Pliny identified the Eridanus of *Venetia* with the Po, while Strabo did not believe in its existence, but he quoted authors who located it near the Po. Apollonius of Rhodes placed the genesis of amber in the dark and fetid marsh formed by the Eridanus in the place where Phaethon had fallen. According to this version, Phaethon seems to have fallen in the thermal zone near the Euganean Hills (between Abano Terme and Montegrotto) where the local cult of Aponus, identified with Apollo, flourished.

Apart from Polesine, how extended was the Venetic influence along the Po? Before the Etruscan colonization, the territory of the Mincio River (Mantua) was occupied by the Veneti, as witnessed by the settlement of Castellazzo della Garolda. With the Etruscan expansion along the territory of Mincio, the border of the Veneti shifted eastwards. The Etruscan settlement called Forcello – in a strategic position between the Mincio and

the Po – was a basin of people from different places: the Rhaetians from Val d'Adige, the Celts from Como (Golasecca), as well as the transalpine Celts from Borgogna, from Marna and South-Western Germany. The long-distance movement of those peoples is attested by the fibulae found in Forcello, because they were common-day objects used by everyone. The manufacturing of amber was also distributed in the northern area, as witnessed by the golden frames in Central Europe's style of the amber treasure of Tiryns.

About the Eridanus, Philostratus says that: *From then onwards, the swans – tenderly singing – would compose a song for the little Phaethon [...].*

But the swans of the Po did not sing; at most, they warbled, as the boatmen consulted by Lucian of Samosata knew. The breed of singing swans lived only in Northern Europe. Déchelette identified the Eridanus with the River Vistula and Pere Bosch-Gimpera with its tributary, called Radunia – a name that was probably "Graecized" into Eridanus. The verse on the *Sea of Kronos* in the *Argonautica* refers to the Adriatic, but we know about the existence of a *Sea of Kronos* also in the North: maybe the Eridanus had its "double" in the Baltic area. Apparently, the ancient Veneti used to reason by "passing routes" and not by localisms. The Apollonian cult and its reference to the Hyperboreans can be considered the link between the Veneti, the myth of Phaethon, amber and the Eridanus. This link would place those who we could call southern or "Adriatic" Hyperboreans near the area of Polesine, while the northern Hyperboreans would be confined in the area of the Vistula and its tributaries.

The Eridanus is located by Pseudo-Scylax in *the territory of the Veneti*. Hesiod refers to the Hyperboreans as those "with good steeds"; thus Benedetta Rossignol dares to identify the Hyperboreans with the Veneti, those "with beautiful horses".

Such an identification seems to match the attribution of the geographer Strabo:

The authors of more ancient times called the Hyperboreans those who lived around the Pontos Euxeinos (the "Hospitable Sea"), the Istros and the Adriatic.

The Black Sea and the Adriatic seem to refer to the Eneti of Paphlagonia and to the Adriatic Veneti. Both Aeschylus (in his tragedy *Prometheus Unbound*) and Pindar thought that the land of Hyperborea was at the spring of the Danube (*Istros* in Greek), not far from the *Lacus Venetus*, i.e. along the way that led to the Rhone from Northern Switzerland. Why then did Apollonius of Rhodes, Aeschylus and Euripides identify instead the Eridanus with the Rhone? The explanation could be that probably they thought that there was a fork of the Eridanus, so that one steam flowed into the Adriatic and the other into the Ligurian Sea (the Rhone). This seems to have been considered more as a "commercial route" rather than a river per se.

It is generally believed that the Veneti took the Apollonian myth from the Romans or maybe from the Greeks. Why exclude the possibility of a Nordic transmission of the Apollonian myth from the Baltic area to the Veneti by the very Hyperboreans? Herodotus, talking about the itinerary of the offers to Apollo from one border to another, places the Hyperboreans above Scythia (north to the Black Sea): from there the handover diverted toward the High Adriatic, before descending to Greece. Callimachus confirms the passage throughout Central Europe and the Adriatic, whereas Pausanias

Importations from Northern Italy and from the Eastern Alps to the area of Lusatian civilization's influence (from T. Malinowsky)

talks about a more ancient direct route crossing Sinop and Paphlagonia. The literary proof that the Hyperborean Route was the Ponto-Baltic way, which started in Anatolia, is provided by the story of the Argonauts where the island of Tinea is quoted as being near the shore between Paphlagonia and Bithynia. In this deserted island the Apollo of the Dawn appears in all his splendour "while he is going toward the route of the Hyperboreans". Alcaeus of Mytilene narrates that Apollo travelled toward the Hyperborean Route upon a chariot pulled by swans. Cygnus, Phaethon's relative and closest friend, cried amber tears together with the Heliades and soon after was turned into a swan.

Before the late Bronze Age, the amber route started from Jutland (Denmark), whereas at the beginning of the Iron Age the route started in the peninsula of Samland, the current Russian enclave of Kaliningrad on the Gdansk Bay. Clear proof that Samland was a bridge between the Baltic and Northern Italy is provided by the great number of objects imported from Hallstatt and Northern Italy to Poland, mainly to the Lusatian civilization region.

The long-distance amber trade presupposed the existence of many specialised settlements such as Komorowo in Poland (district of Szamotuły, near Poznań). Digs in the area have revealed a great amount of local rough amber, as well as products imported from Northern Italy and from the Hallstatt region. Likewise, thousands of glass beads presumably from these same distant areas were found in hundreds of Polish sites belonging to the Lusatian civilization. Baltic amber is known to have been worked on site in the High Adriatic and Eastern Alps, where shapes unknown to the Baltic area were found.

To conclude, the localization of the Eridanus can be divided into three phases:
1) the oldest phase – witnessed by Hesiod and Herodotus – that focused on the place of origin of amber and placed the river in the North of Europe, where the Vistula flows.
2) the middle-phase concerning the Proto-Venetic Polesine, which focused on the two cities of Frattesina (12th-10th centuries BC) and Adria (10th-6th centuries BC), where women dressed in black used to "mourn" Phaethon's death. In this phase the attention shifted from the place of origin of amber to the site where the product was sold.
3) the late-phase of the route between Padua and Bologna in which the Eridanus was located in the southern part of the Po delta, after the Etruscan expansion in the 6th century BC.

In the 6th century BC – when there was the first historical mention to the Hyperboreans – the Lusatian civilization was coming to an end in Poland. According to Kristian Kristiansen, the Dorians – who were considered descendants of Apollo – might have been a

population belonging to the Middle-Danube Urnfield culture who had penetrated into Greece from the north. In general, it is a commendable effort to try to give a historical name to the tribes that transmitted such an important and articulated culture as that of the Urnfield; it is unlikely that the ancient writers considered them so insignificant as not to give them a name.

The key question is to identify who transported the amber from the Baltic to the *Venetia* region. First of all, it is necessary to understand if a specific people was specialised in the amber trade or if it was simply passed on from one tribe to the other. Attilio Mastrocinque is inclined to believe that in the Eastern Alps the peoples of the Hallstatt culture "mediated" the trade since many objects from Hallstatt were found in Poland and many Italic objects were found in Hallstatt. If we accept this theory – plausible if we consider the wealth of the local lords in the Alps – what was the situation before Hallstatt? Did the Proto-Veneti of Polesine or the rising Este culture have direct access to the amber fields before the supremacy of Hallstatt? If so, which Baltic population used to commerce with them?

Apollo Lykeios, of Praxiteles. In Argos the most important building was the Temple of Apollo Lykeios, built by Danaus after that a wolf overcame a bull.

If the Veneti received the amber from the Hyperboreans, we still have to solve the enigma about the identity of this mysterious Baltic community: who were the Hyperboreans? The Proto-Veneti of the Vistula inhabited the Baltic area extensively in the age of the Hyperborean legend and they also travelled along the way of the priestesses who periodically went down to Delos in honour of Apollo Hyperborean. Leto too stopped in the land of the Hyperboreans while she was looking for a place to give birth to Apollo and was accompanied by the she-wolves to Delos, taking on herself the semblance of a wolf. Beyond the Carpathian-Danube region, cradle of the Solar boat, the habitat of wolves spread to the Baltic, i.e. the reign of Apollo *Lykeios* or "Apollo of the Wolves". Were the "fathers" of Apollo *Patroos* some unknown heirs of the Lusatian culture? Is there any archaeological clue about the Proto-Venetic solar cult among the civilization of Lusatia? Many objects recovered from the Lusatian culture by archaeologists are believed to be related to a cult of the solar deity – as ceramics with painted solar images moulded into bird figures. It is thus possible that at the end of the Lusatian culture, 5th cent. BC ca., a Lusatian Sun goddess – like the one holding birds in his hands or the goddess *Rektia* (close to Artemis) – "ceded" the solar symbolism to the male Greek Apollo as the new solar god, who before was simply and only a god of health (and such remained in the *Venetia*).

THE TIN ROUTE

Since ancient times tin has been intensively used as an alloy with copper, because it increases the hardness and mechanical properties of copper, thereby giving origin to bronze. The tin mines were located in few and precise areas along the tin route, which overlapped and intersected with the amber routes, along which the fossil resin travelled from the Baltic region to the Adriatic one.

Cassiterite

Tin, a very malleable shiny white-silver metal, is extremely difficult to find in its natural form and at low temperatures it transforms into a grey-powder. For this reason, tin artefacts preserved in an unheated environment, at a temperature of less than 13°C are subjected to a slow physical decay, known as "tin plague". In its mineral form tin is mainly an oxide called cassiterite (SnO_2), which can form crystals or small grains.

In the myth, the Cassiterides (from the Greek word for tin Κασσίτερος/Kassiteros) were known as the Tin Islands, in the extreme West. Probably they are the Isles of Scilly (*Ynysek Syllan* in Cornish), which form an archipelago at forty-five kilometres from the south-western part of Cornwall (Land's End), where tin is present as a trace element. These islands might be a point of support for the tin route: on the northern coast of Cornwall there are many mines exploited since the Bronze Age, like the vein of Wheal Virgin (village of St. Day) or the old mine of South Crofty (village of Pool). Ships sailed southward from the Isles of Scilly to the Breton coast of the Veneti (Morbihan). Pseudo-Scymnus believed that the Cassiterides were in the Adriatic Sea, which seems to indicate a southern stop-over of the route.

Tin mines and other minerals were also found in Brittany. The ancient deposit of Abbaretz-Nozay, in the lower Loire, was exactly in the middle between the tribes of the Veneti and the Namnetes. The Veneti extracted iron from Paimpont, the future Arthurian forest of Brocéliande. In Brittany there were many metal-bearing deposits, richer than the ones in Tuscany. Timothy Champion thinks that the Veneti gained control over the tin trade and were intermediaries for the Phoenician sailors. In the 6th century, the Greeks – following the path traced by Pytheas – obtained the alloy of for their bronze's swords thanks to the Atlantic tin arriving by circumnavigation of the Spanish coast, passing through the Strait of Gibraltar and finally reaching the Greek city of Massalia (Marseille). The rising naval supremacy of the Carthaginians and the defeat in the naval Battle of Alalia (535 BC) led to the ruin of the Greek monopoly in the Mediterranean Sea, thus forcing the Greeks to find a new route for tin supply.

The Greeks abandoned also the routes directed toward Marseille's port that did not circumnavigate Spain, namely the fluvial route that started from Brittany – following

the flow of the *Loire* from the mouth and then the *Rhône* to Marseille –, as well as the southern-English route which connected the Isle of Wight to the *Loire* through the high line of the Seine, at the boundary with Belgic Gaul, and then, through a land track, arrived to Marseille after passing Vix. The latter, already used in the Middle Bronze Age, was the "Seine route" which moved to the Italian peninsula up to Greece and Mycenae.

The new tin route traced by the Greeks started from the mining deposits in Brittany and Cornwall – both under the Veneti's control – and arrived in Greece. It was a fluvial and land route that could be divided into two main itineraries:

1) The Po Valley route leading to the Adriatic, which obviously did not go to Marseille but cut the route near the Swiss junction (La Tène). From Col des Mosses and the Sarine Valley (along the Saane River) it went to Valais and, after crossing the Great St. Bernard, it went through the Po Valley to Spina.

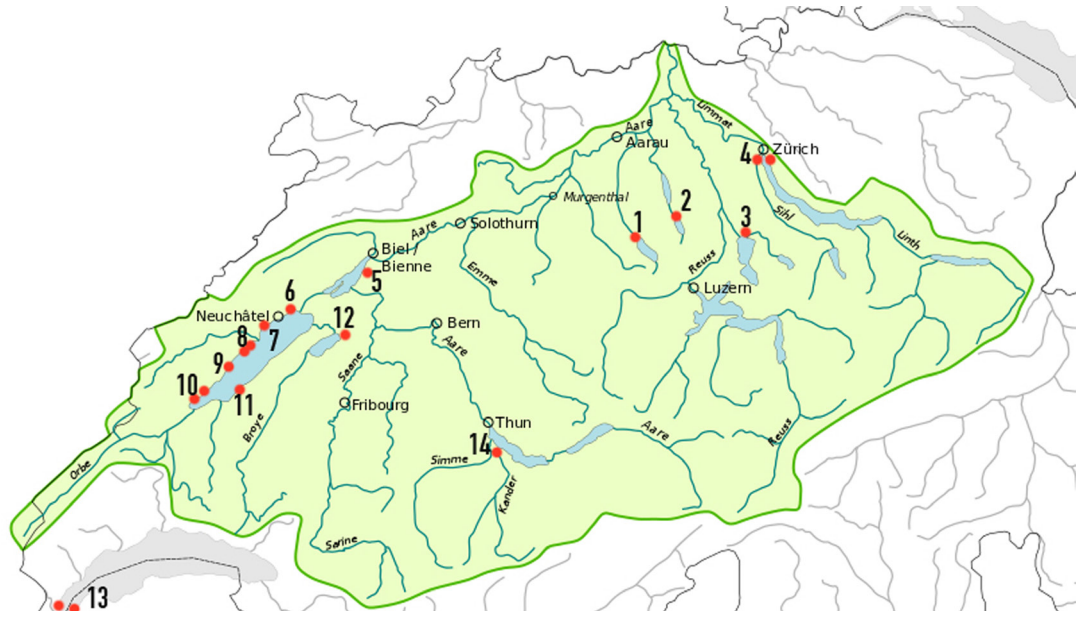
2) The itinerary along the *Northern Swiss line*, which entered the Via Claudia Augusta near the Resia Pass and went on southward to Altinum (Venice).

Rare finds of ceramic objects with tin decorations, which date back to the Late Bronze Age, are the first evidence of the exchange of the metal in Central Europe. In ancient times Switzerland was an important link between the trade routes that reached incredibly far destinations using navigable rivers: the Rhine (together with the Meuse delta) crosses the Netherlands and flows into the North Sea, the Rhône flows southwards to

The Aar Basin and the south-west north-east route in the Swiss plateau which, north of the Alps, joins Venetomagos (Vieu) to the Lacus Venetus (modern Lake Constance).

the Mediterranean Sea, the Ticino and Po rivers flow into the Adriatic, the Danube – through its tributary Aenus (Inn) – connects Switzerland and the Black Sea. Lakes were used as regional connectors between the valleys of the Alps and the pre-alpine foothills, or as stop-overs along the passage that crossed the mountain chain. Interesting was in Switzerland the import from the Mediterranean of wine amphorae and fine ceramic, which already in the early Iron Age arrived there mainly from the Rhône Valley.

The fluvial routes situated in the Swiss plateau were – together with the land routes that extended and matched them – complementary parts of the line connecting Lake Geneva to Lake Constance (a line that goes from south-west to north-east). Only after crossing Eastern France's Alps between Lyon and Geneva, in the historical region of Bugey, and after reaching the city of Vieu – the Venetic site of Venetomagos (*magos* means 'farming market') –, the connection between the Veneti of Brittany and the Veneti of the Adriatic followed the *Swiss line south-west and north-east*. In Switzerland this route crossed the Val-de-Travers (in the Canton of Neuchâtel), stopped at the important archaeological site of Châtillon-sur-Glâne (Canton of Fribourg) and then went on along the western hills of the Swiss plateau of Jura, along the lower valley of the Aar before the river flowed into the Rhine. In the Canton of Aargau (region in the lower Aar) we can find other Venetic toponyms which seem to attest centres of Venetic control: near Unterkulm there is Windischberg, while today's Windisch was Vindonissa, i.e. the Roman *castrum* (meaning 'fort'). In the outermost part of the *Swiss line south-west and north-east* the route entered the Rhine Valley, where the river leads into Lake Constance (on the border between Switzerland, Germany and Austria) and then flows out of it.



Archaeological sites in Switzerland and tin findings (Late Bronze Age): 1 Sursee-Gammainseli, 2 Hitzkirch-Moos, 3 Zug-Sumpf, 4 Zurich-Mozartstrasse, Zurich-Grosser Hafner and Zurich-Wollishofen/Haumesser, 5 Mörigen, 6 Hauterive-Champréveyres, 7 Auvernier-North, 8 Cortaillod-East and Bevais, 9 Concise, 10 Grandson-Corcelettes and Onnens, 11 Estavayer-le-Lac, 12 Muntelier, 13 Geneva-Eaux-Vives and Geneva-Pâquis, 14 Aeschi-Bad Heustrich. From Ebbe H. Nielsen (2014).

The *Lacus Venetus* (Lake Constance) was first mentioned by the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela in 43 AD. He noticed that the Rhine flowed into two lakes and gave them the Latin names of *Lacus Venetus* to Obersee (the upper lake) and *Lacus Acronius* to Untersee (the lower lake). Pliny the Elder used the name *Lacus Brigantinus*, which probably derives from the Roman city of *Brigantium* (today's Bregenz), named after the Vindelic tribe of the Briganti. The lake is situated at 50 kilometres from Brigobanne, a city near the River Breg and near the River Brigach in the Southern Germany (pre-Roman Vindelicia), which was inhabited by the Liburnians, a tribe similar to the Veneti. Significantly, in Veneto there is the town of Breganze, in the province of Vicenza, an area already settled in the Roman Age and situated along the "Route of the Veneti".

The tin route travelled on the northern bank of the lake and joined the Venetic amber route that ran along the Mount Venet – near Fliess (Imst) –, then from the Resian Valley and Val d'Adige to Este (the same as the Roman Via Claudia Augusta). Another Venetic toponym indicated in Tyrol by Slovenian historian Jožko Šavli, not far from the Mount Venet and located in Ventertal, is the village of Vent in the famous Ötztal Valley where "Ötzi", the Iceman, was found. Dating back to 3200 BC of the Stone Age, he was genetically marked by the haplogroup G2a2b (the haplogroup G originated in Georgia and was then concentrated mainly in Bavaria). Probably this Similaun Man had a base of hunters and herders by the site of Hohler Stein – a couple of kilometres from the village of Vent. This bears witness to the ancientness of certain routes of human passage.

As shown by the previous map, tin findings in Switzerland are copious. Pendants and objects made of tin – as well as pieces of rough material – are quite uncommon outside the Swiss borders. On the bank of Lake Constance, by the archaeological site of Unteruhldingen-Stollenwiesen (Bodenseekreis) a tin pendant from the Late Bronze Age was found, while M. Primas mentions two wheel-shaped pendants found in the North of Italy and similar to the ones known in Switzerland in the Late Bronze Age. Until the recent tin discovery in Sursee-Gammainseli (UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Canton of Lucerne), tin ingots of the Bronze Age were almost absent in continental Europe, unlike the numerous copper and bronze ingots. An exception was represented by the pieces of tin found in the Late Bronze Age settlement by the Rhine on the ex-Isle of Säckingen, near the Swiss border of the German district of Waldshut.

The archaeological material, dated between the end of 6th century and the beginning of the 5th century BC, involves the sites of charge and discharge between the fluvial route and the land route – as in France, for example, Vix (Mont Lassois), Bragny-sur-Saône, Salins-les-Bains (Château) and, in Switzerland, the Hallstatt *oppidum* ('fortified settlement') of Châtillon-sur-Glâne. All these sites were connected by some common elements, like objects imported from Aegeus, that is, Greek ceramics with black figures or pottery in the Phocaean style (from the Greek city on the western coast of Anatolia). Châtillon-sur-Glâne, besides a rich booty of important objects and amphorae from Massalia, also preserves jars probably coming from Este (*Venetia*). These sites were inhabited in 540 BC, but were abandoned all at the same time around 480 BC. It is possible that Châtillon-sur-Glâne managed an important long-distance trade along the course of the Sarine River toward Northern Italy and the Adriatic – a much more effortless route than controlling the Strait of Messina. One of the main reasons for the richness of this site might be both its being a "breakpoint of charge" equipped with harbour and, as affirmed by archaeologist Hanni Schwab, its function of intermediary for the manufacturing of bronze weapons required by Greece (that's why they needed tin). Châtillon-sur-Glâne was thus situated on one of the most important tin routes which from Cornwall and Brittany went to Greece. What happened during the year 480 BC? Why were all these sites abandoned at the same time? In 480 BC the Greeks defeated the Carthaginians in the Battle of Salamis and the route along the Rhône was open again, besides a new alternative way viable from the metalliferous mountains of Bohemia, in correspondence with the amber route.

The tin routes were strategically connected to the amber route according to the configuration of the land and so as to secure the valuable goods against bandits and invaders. The link between the trade routes managed by the Veneti included different goods and was spread all over Europe. Moreover, it is important to point out that in Anatolia the oldest amber route from the Baltic (following southward the course of the Vistula and crossing the Kiev region to the Black Sea) connected to intercity ways of the Middle East toward Central Asia, the Far East and India.

Archaeologists think that with today's scientific knowledge it is impossible to determine "who transported tin and how"; this is true for all the goods traded in the Continent in prehistorical times. Archaeology cannot give us an answer. However, since the archaeological sites of tin were found in the point of charge-discharge – that is, in the passage between the rivers and the land ways –, it is probable that the transport of heavy goods employed the fluvial way. It seems obvious that the ancestors of the Rauraci, Allobroges, Sequani, Nantuates, Seduni, Veragri, Tigurini and Helvetii – because of their sedentary nature – were not directly involved in the long-distance transport of tin. It is also difficult to imagine a hand-to-hand passing from one tribe to another, because it would be complicated and dispersive: few minerals would have reached their destination and with high costs. We know of the existence of specialised groups who travelled in convoys along the main stretches for the transport and trade along the main commercial routes: the Greeks, the Etruscans and the Veneti. The Etruscans had their own tin mines in Tuscany. The Romans did not use the fluvial route, but they built roads wherever they needed to carry goods by carts. They were not skilled traders, so they conquered the mineral resources, stealing the territories and submitting the local people – as an imperial force. This was the strategy used in Brittany and Cornwall, where the Romans conquered tin resources and replaced the Veneti as merchants. We certainly know that the Veneti of Brittany transported tin by sea between the two sides of the English Channel, as witnessed by the Venetic ship that was found loaded with tin in the south of England. Françoise Bader writes:

The Veneti chose the main rivers of Europe as migration ways, […] rivers that where favourable to their attitude of great merchants and specialised transporters: goods travelled by donkey and by ship which made them formidable to Caesar's eyes. The Veneti traded in amber from the Baltic to the Adriatic, and dealt with tin when they arrived in the Atlantic coasts.

Estavayer-le-Lac (Lake Neuchâtel), beads with spiral and eye decorations from Frattesina (Rovigo), 1060-950 BC

Beads with spiral and eye style found in Frattesina

It is thus possible that the Veneti had an active role in transporting the mineral through the tin route into the continent and throughout Switzerland. We must consider some evidence, such as the discovery of some jars from Este in the archaeological site of Châtillon-sur-Glâne, or the existence of Venetic toponyms along the tin route, for example Venania not far from *Lacus Venetus*, in the area inhabited by the Estiones (a name that reminds us of the city of Este). There is no other possible explanation for the presence of a Venetic colony in the inhospitable and inaccessible alpine ter-

ritory, if we do not consider commercial reasons.

Together with tin, the convoys driven by the Veneti traded in other valuable goods. During the Iron Age and in the Roman Age, the Alps had an important function in the amber route, as supported by many infrared spectroscopy analyses. In the Eastern Alps a prevalent site was the Val d'Adige for the great concentration of amber findings and the strategical importance of this ancient alpine route. All the samples in the area are of succinite and demonstrate that both the Resia Pass and the Brenner Pass were a preferential lane for Baltic amber to Italy, where – particularly at Frattesina – the analysis of infrared spectroscopy identified the presence of succinite in amber samples. The German name of amber is *bernstein*; in Switzerland, the amber route (*Bernsteinstrasse*) was directed from the Rhine toward the city of Bern, connected to the amber routes from Belgium (along Meuse River) and France (along Rhône River). Evident is the importance of the "market" of Venetomagos (Vieu), a city in Eastern France washed by a tributary of the Rhône and situated on the two main commercial routes: the amber and the tin route.

If we try to draw a conclusion, despite the few data collected, we have to distinguish three phases that marked the development of the tin route: the Late Bronze Age, the Greco-Etruscan Age and the Roman Age.

Late Bronze Age - The inhabitants of Frattesina (in the Po delta, 12th-10th centuries BC) got tin mainly from Tuscany, by Monte Valerio at Campiglia Marittima (Livorno Province); they were great amber merchants, devoted to the cult of the Solar Boat. Campiglia Marittima was the only tin mine (of cassiterite) in Italy and *pick-shaped ingots* were found there. This kind of tin bars were also found in some places near Lake Constance and at the mouth of the rivers Rhône and Po. Metallurgy was important at Frattesina not only for the production of fibulae, weapons and tools, but also for fine objects like situlas. This is witnessed by the extraordinary amount of refined objects found there, which was ten times above the average of the previous settlements. The local "barrel-shaped" beads with spiral drawings or with eye-decorations were found near Fribourg and the marsh village of Neuchâtel. Considering the importance of tin trade in this Swiss area, beads were probably bartered for tin, when the Po was the way to reach Switzerland.

Three cremation tombs belonging to the Bronze Age (1300-1200 BC, Urnfield culture) where found in Vuadens, in the district of Le Brienz (Canton of Fribourg). At that time many other people travelled and traded: in the same area a knife was found probably from Peschiera (situated by Lake Garda), which was the site of a culture unexpectedly cut off in 1200 BC together with the Terramare culture.

Greco-Etruscan Age - A snake-shaped fibula was found at Châtillon-sur-Glâne; this kind of object was typical of Golasecca (Ticino, 9th-4th centuries BC) and witnesses the access of different peoples to the trade and bartering of the goods. Snake- and dragon-shaped fibulae of Golasecca were also found in the village of Bussy (Pré de Fond). The presence both at Châtillon-sur-Glâne and Bussy of subalpine elements, belonging to the Golasecca culture, shows the essential links of a large network of long-distance trade, proving that the area of Golasecca acted as one of the most important intermediaries for tin and amber.

However, in this period the Greeks had the main role at first: in Greece, there were

poor resources of copper and tin mines were totally absent. Yet, the Greeks constantly needed tin to supply their army with bronze weapons, helmets, cuirasses, shields and jambs. Some studies demonstrate that 20 tons of tin were used for the Battle of Plataea. For this reason, the price of tin was almost two-thousand times higher than that of copper and as precious as gold. Tin was necessary also for jars, tools or works of art.

With the first long sea-voyages of the Greeks, Massalia (Marseille) was set up around 600 BC by the Phocaeans – who had migrated from Asia Minor after being defeated by the Persians – and the city became soon the access from the sea used by the Greeks for the tin trade. The fluvial route from the Rhône and the Seine led to the Atlantic Ocean and, after crossing the English Channel, it arrived at the tin mines of Cornwall. The Battle of Alalia (535 BC) – fought near Corsica and Sardinia by the Phocaeans against an alliance of Etruscans and Carthaginians – damaged Greek navigation in the Gulf of Lion, where Massalia was built at the outlet of the Rhône. The Phocaeans gained the victory but paid a high price – it was a "Cadmean victory" according to Herodotus. The battle led to decades of stoppage in the expansion of the Greek trade westbound in the Mediterranean Sea. By contrast, the Etruscans expanded into the Po Valley and their commercial relationships in the Swiss area had a key role for the flourishing of the Celtic culture between the 6th and 5th cent. BC, i.e. during the transition from the Hallstatt culture (800-470 BC) to the following La Tène culture (470-15 BC). Recently French archaeologists (maybe in an eagerness of *grandeur*) have started hypothesizing that the Celts had already been attested in 1500 BC, that Hallstatt was certainly Celtic and that the Celts had practiced incineration first, even if in the La Tène culture they practiced only burials.

Tin was a very important resource and the Greeks needed to find an alternative route in order to get hold of the valuable metal. A legend tells that in the Elettridi Islands, by the Adriatic Gulf, there were two statues: one made of tin and the other of bronze, wrought in archaic style by Daedalus. Indeed, the Greeks had found a new commercial itinerary from the Etruscan port city of Spina and regained the fluvial route of the Seine at Mont Lassois, crossing the Alps of the Aosta Valley, the Great St. Bernard, Martigny (in the Canton of

Valais, in Switzerland), Col des Mosses, Châtillon-sur-Glâne and finally Lake Neuchâtel.

For a long time, the precise position of Spina was highly debated: it was a real archaeological mystery until it was discovered by chance through the reclamation of the area around Ferrara, in today's Po Delta Regional Park, near Campotto and, more precisely, in Valle Trebba and Valle Pega. Along the route that went from Spina to Adria, the finding of hundreds of fragments of Greek objects traces the long path that passed through Forcello (on the Po River) and Salins, between Lake Neuchâtel and the River Saona, to follow the course of the Seine. It is not implied that the Greeks transported the tin themselves at such an early time: the objects of Greek manufacture and the magnificent Greek treasures found in the tombs of Vix (Châtillon-sur-Seine) and Troyes (Lavau) are not enough to prove it. In Vix some amphorae of the Massalia kind were not made with clay from Marseille and may have had an Italian origin. It is also known that in the Hallstattian context the most ancient and important Mediterranean imports were in the eastern part of the corridor Rhône-Saône, not in the Rhône flowing to Marseille. Furthermore the examinations carried out in England in this Late Hallstattian Age suggested a minimal exploitation of the mines in Cornwall. Certainly, the rise and development of the so-called Celtic princes happened in this lapse of time. However, at the end of the 6th century BC and in particular in the 5th century BC, there were lots of fragments of Greek objects in the Tartarus and Adige (two rivers flowing in the *Venetia*), which suggests that there might have been a contemporary and parallel 'Venetic route'.

Half a century later – in 480 BC – the Greeks defeated the Carthaginians in the Battle of Salamis and restored the usual commercial route along the Rhône. Suddenly important Swiss sites, such as Châtillon-sur-Glâne, lost importance. The fortune of Spina fell into decline not only for this change of course, but most of all for the growing Roman influence: in 396 BC, after a ten-year war, Rome conquered Veii, expanding its control over Southern Etruria.

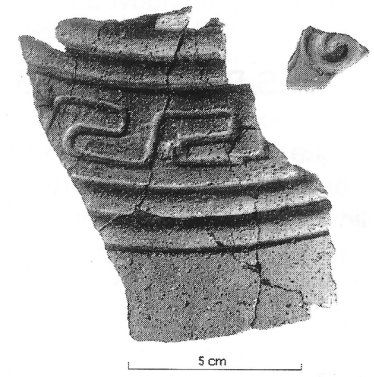
Roman Age - Thanks to the Veneti's mediation in the peninsula of Armorica, Brittany sold tin and copper from insular Britain, as well as gold and lead from Poullaouen (in the Finistère district of Brittany) to the Romans and the Italic peoples. This trade from north-west to south-east included also amber, slaves, hunting dogs, leathers and salt; were especially renowned in Rome the salted food products and cured meats of Armorica. Moreover, there is witness of a commercial exchange of products between the Atlantic Veneti and "Central Gaul": in different sites of Armorica settled by the Veneti there are many objects from Central Gaul, such as the *sigillata* ('decorated vases') of Lezoux and the painted ceramics of Vichy, as the lava or basalt grindstones and, probably, miniature statues made of white soil. Transports were made possible both by river (along the course of the Loire and Allier) and by land, probably through the pre-Roman tin route – from Armorica to the Rhône Valley, crossing Vichy. The Veneti had the supremacy not only over the sea trade but also over the rivers and lakes, at least over the Loire and the Saône (the main tributary of the Rhône at the border with Switzerland). An inscription discovered at Lyons mentions the name of a man from *Venetia* region as *patronus nautorum* ('patron of sailors') of the area Saône-et-Loire, in the region of Bourgogne.

When Denis Ramseyer, the director of the Celtic "Laténium Museum of Neuchâtel", conducted the excavations at the Châtillon-sur-Glâne site, he found, alongside a great amount of Attic ceramics from Greece of the 6th century BC, potteries maybe from the Este culture. On one of these jars there is a wave pattern typical of the production of Este. However, Geneviève Lüscher – who has studied the problem of imports – has recently contested this assumed origin and hypothesised a local production. The four jars are dark grey or black and measure from 50 cm in diameter at the mouth to 70 cm maximum diameter; some of them are *dolia*, i.e., jars used to transport wine on trading vessels. Another debated issue concerns the amphorae probably from Italy and the *ship-shaped* fibulae from Este discovered in Switzerland.

Meeting points of the commercial routes from Vannes to Switzerland

Some Veneti travelled from Brittany to the beginning of the *south-west north-east line* of the Swiss plateau, while others reached Switzerland from the Adriatic using the tin route. Archaeologists thus need to re-examine the archives and the deposits of museums, in order to determine how significant and important the isolated signs of the Venetic presence in the area are. If it were possible to demonstrate the Venetic presence in both the tin routes, we would be able to discover a mid-point of contact between the Veneti from the Atlantic and the ones from the Adriatic. Even more interesting and exciting for modern history lovers would be to take the same route from Greece to Scotland along the Tin Route hypothesised by Hanni Schwab.

Strabo (ca. 64 BC - 24 AD) wrote his *Geographica* before Tacitus, Ptolemy and Pliny the Elder. First among the historians, he suggested the ethnic unity of the Veneti scattered across Europe and identified the Vindelici, who occupied a portion of present-day Bavaria, as a common root of some Venetic tribes. Strabo argued that the Estiones and the Brigantii belonged to the Vindelici and that the Vennones proved to be the boldest warriors of all the Vindelici. He also believed that Brittany's Veneti, famous for the naval battle against Caesar, established their flourishing colony in the Upper Adriatic region.



Châtillon-sur-Glâne. Fragment of the jar decorated with waves (from Este?)

Archaeological sites have always been important destinations of international tourism. Ancient commercial routes are likewise interesting for travellers: consider, for example, the modern tours along the silk route. A great number of opportunities are offered by the ancient routes of the Veneti, a commercial people whose identity was linked to movement. While the amber route is well-known and documented, most people do not know the "Tin route", which linked Cornwall with Switzerland and the south of France; it connected the Veneti of Brittany to the Adriatic Veneti and went on toward Greece. Europe has very few sources of tin. It was therefore of extreme importance throughout ancient times to import it, long distance from known tin mining districts of antiquity. Nowadays, the Swiss itinerary can be covered by car in 8-10 days, if we include the journey to and from Veneto to the borders of Switzerland. To avoid rainy or snowy weather (possible also in spring), the best time is between June and September. To contain Switzerland's high costs, travellers can buy food in supermarkets and opt for stays in nice and quiet Bed & Breakfasts.

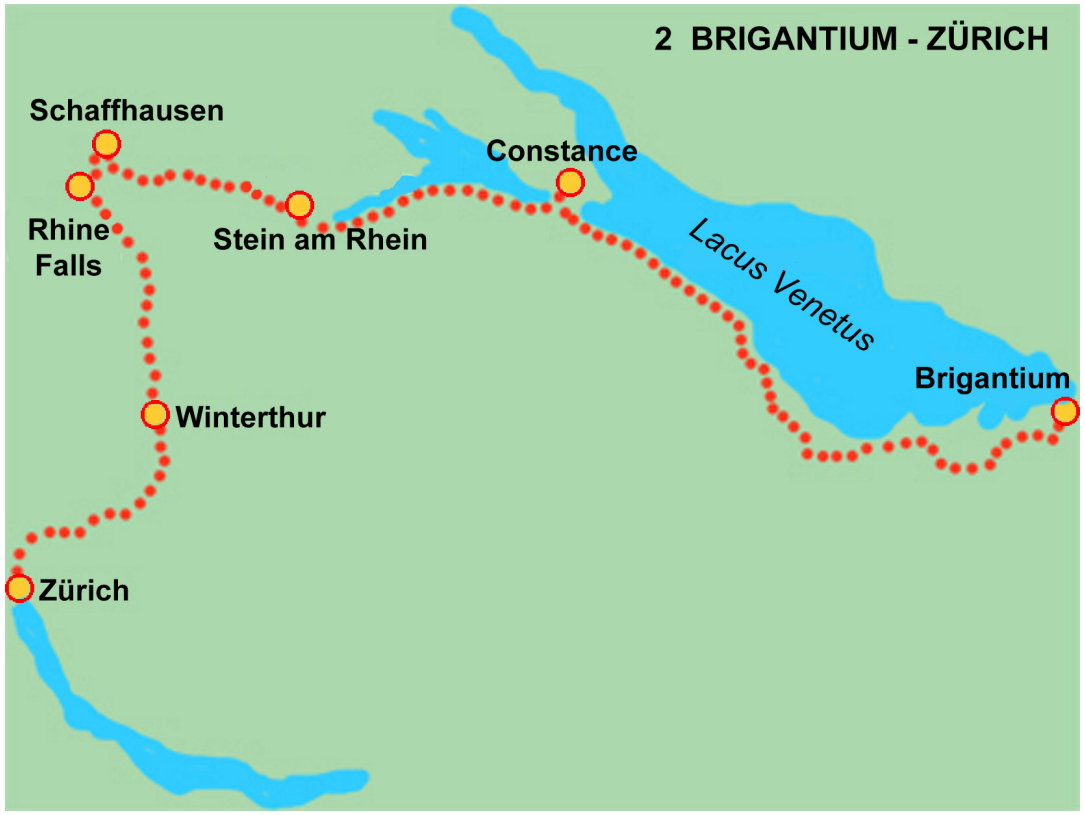
1 - The southern itinerary of the Tin route partly coincided with the Via Claudia Augusta. From the Adriatic plains to the Danube, this ancient Roman road is now experiencing a revival after almost 2,000 years of history: the Via Claudia Augusta has become a bridge between different cultures, environments and impressions. It is a classic itinerary which crosses three nations with a rich variety of landscapes, traditions, artistic treasures and gastronomic specialities (like cheese and chocolate). It thus promotes a cultural tourism, which can be young and eco-friendly. Via Claudia Augusta Altinate, an ancient military road built by the Romans, was completed under the Emperor Claudius in the 1st cent. AD to connect *Altinum* (in the mainland of Venice) to Augusta, in Bavaria. The road started from present-day Altino and crossed Oderzo, Serravalle, Follina, Feltre, Trento (an alternative route started instead from Ostiglia and reached Trento and Verona). From Trento the Via Claudia Augusta crossed the Resia Pass (South Tyrol) to Fliess and Mount Venet, near Landec. Here the road branched into two routes: the first route went over Augusta Vindelicorum (modern Augsburg), in the Rhaetia Secunda, while the other went westwards – following the tin route. In the Roman Age, it took about 110 hours (approximately 15 or 20 days) to walk from Altinum to Lake Constance.

For those who have time and love alpine landscapes, or for those who wish to travel along the Italian length of the Claudia Augusta, in about six hours by car it is possible to reach – 40 km away from the Austrian border – the crossroads of Fliess: starting from Altinum and going through Oderzo, Serravalle (Vittorio Veneto), Feltre, Trento, Merano and the Resia Pass. In the section between Fliess and Bregenz (a town set on the border between Austria and Switzerland) some milestones of the 3rd century AD sign a deviation out of the Claudia Augusta that from Leermos travels westwards, crossing Sonthofen and Venania (modern commune of Gestraz) up to Brigantium. Turning instead eastwards from Leermos, there is the route of the Val d'Adige which connects Verona and Brenner, passing through Zirl and Veldidena (Wilten near Innsbruck).

For those who want to reach Switzerland quickly, the shorter and more practical road, is the motorway through Padua, Vicenza, Trento, Bolzano, Merano, Castelbello, Sluderno, the Resia Lake and the Resia Pass. Mountain lovers should stop off at Castelbello – Reinhold Messner's house and mountain museum – but everyone should visit the little museum of Fliess entirely dedicated to Venetic findings of the Mount Venet (booked visits).

2 - At Lake Constance it is possible to finally admire the *Lacus Venetus*. The first town to visit is Brigantium, known also as Brigantâa (the modern city of Bregenz, in Austria). It was an important commercial junction on the *Lacus Venetus* and belonged to the Roman province of *Raetia secunda*. Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy mentioned Brigantium, while Johannes Tibian (1578) elevated the famous name of Lake Constance "up to stars" (*praeclarum nomen ad astra volat*).

Brigantium, decorated comb typical of Frattesina



The Vor Alberg Museum of Bregenz exhibits some Roman finds among which an flashy amber necklace and a bas-relief of Epona, the horse goddess. Only 19 tombs out of 1,084 contain Germanic findings and thus at the moment it is not possible to state which population inhabited the *Lacus Venetus* area before the Romans arrived. Archaeologists hope to be more precise in the near future with the results of genetic research (not yet available). It is however certain that the *Vennontes* had occupied a specific area near Bregenz, north of the Pritanni. The Vennoneti (the name is similar) were an ancient tribe located instead in Valtelline and Eastern Switzerland whose presence has been clearly identified – alongside that of the Venostes – in a Roman monument erected in 7 BC in the French city of La Turbie, in order to celebrate the defeat of the Alpine peoples.

Epona, the horse goddess. Brigantium (Lacus Venetus), 70-100 AD

The Urnfield culture had already gained a foothold before then (1200-800 BC) and precisely on the Montlingerberg hill, 20 km south of Bregenz. Right here, the archaeologists found the largest amount of type Allumiere amber beads (typical of Frattesina) and Italian-like votive small shovels, as well as several items of pottery shaped like those uncovered in the Trentino-Alto Adige region.

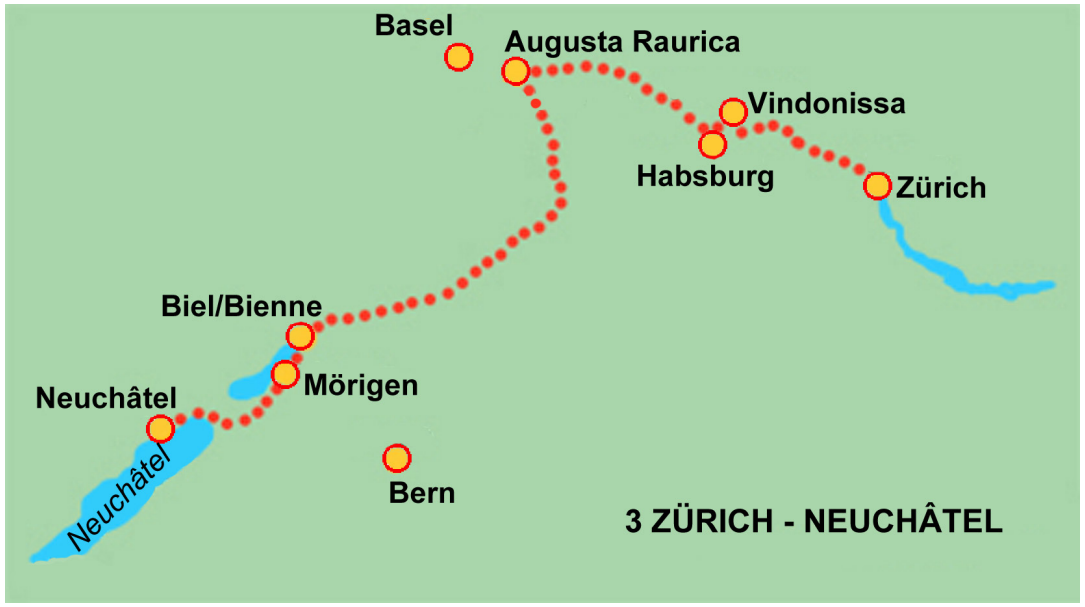
Moving along the south coast of the lake Constance, we can enter into the "German-speaking part" of Switzerland and, by travelling across the Thurgau and St. Gallen cantons, reach the shores the city of Constance. The *Chronicon of Reichenau (Codex Augiensis)* quotes an important event that occurred in 830:

Corpus S. Marci evangelistae sub nomine Valentis martyris Ratoldus Veronensis episcopus a duce Venetiae impetravit, et cum corpore Genesii martyris in Augiam insulam attulit.

Augiam, or Reichenau, is a small island located on the minor branch of Lake Constance (Untersee) and is the seat of an important Benedictine abbey whose miniatures have been included in Germany's World Heritage List. The Venetian family of the Candiano had strengthened its ties with the Holy Roman Empire ruled by the Saxon dynasty of the Ottonians. For reasons of state, this Venetian Dogal family formed various alliances with both the German emperors Otto I and Otto II. In the meantime, Waldrada – the daughter of the Marquis of Tuscany and first cousin of Otto I's wife – married doge Pietro IV Candiano. In order to strengthen the ties between the two families, after the great fire in Venice which badly damaged St. Mark's Basilica in 976 and following the mysterious disappearance of the Saint's holy relics – or rather the failure to find them –, the Candianos are said to have given the abbey of Reichenau a holy relic of St. Mark, which is there preserved still today.

St. Mark in the Gero-codex (969), the earliest of the Gospel manuscripts of Reichenau School

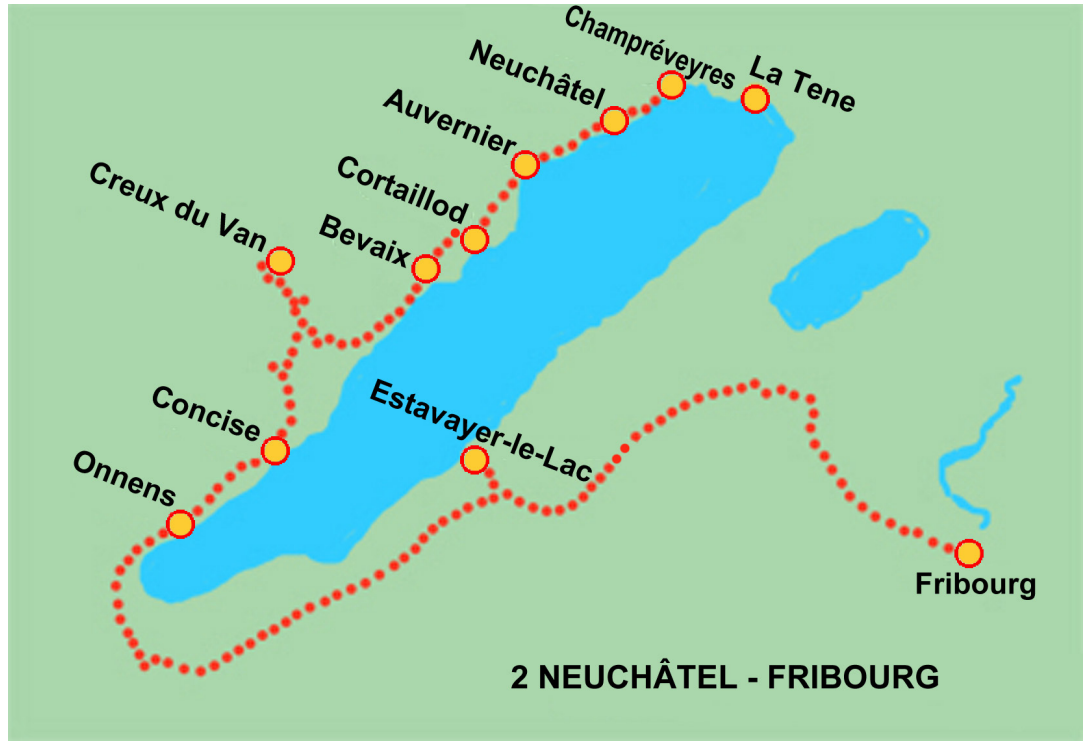
Entering the Canton of Schaffhausen, we come across the municipality of Stein am Rhein where it is possible to admire the ruins of the walls erected in the 3rd century for the *Tasgetium*'s Roman fortification. The Renaissance half-timbered houses, together with its beautifully frescoed buildings, make Stein am Rhein one of the most elegant and fascinating historic centres of the Alps. Since in the past it was difficult to reach the village by land, here the fluvial transport showed all its importance. The waterway, only a few miles off, is naturally interrupted by the Rhine Falls, located near Schaffhausen. These astonishing cascades can be considered the biggest in Europe with an overall height of 23 meters, a width of 150 meters and a summer capacity of 700 m^3/s.



Traces of tin from the Late Bronze Age have been discovered in Zurich in the suburbs of Mozartstrasse, Zurich-Grossner Hafner and Zurich-Wollishofen/Haumesser. The city was originally a *castrum* whose ancient name was *Turicum*. Today the biggest city in Switzerland, Zurich is an efficient and dynamic metropolis as well as one of the leading financial centres of Europe. Many banks have their headquarters here, including UBS – the greatest private bank in the world –, and Zurich ranked second in the 2013/ 2014 "quality of living" worldwide survey (according to the consulting firm Mercer).

3 - Half an hour from Zurich, in the Canton of Aargau – the less mountainous – there are the remains of the Roman legionary camp of Vindonissa, present-day Windisch. Before the Romans arrived, Vindonissa was a fortified *oppidum* and usually *vindo* is etymologically linked to the Celtic word for "white", even though another plausible hypothesis put forward by G. B. Pellegrini suggests that it may also refer to a Gaulish loanword attested in the Venetic language. Cremation was part of the religious rituals in this area in the 1st century AD. Located on the River Aar, Vindonissa was on the Roman road that passed through Brigantium and connected the cities Augusta Raurica and Augusta Vindelicorum (on the Danube). With its almost 6,000 legionaries, the camp was densely populated and was the seat of the *XIII Legio* at the border between Roman Empire and Germany.

A Roman legionary



At only three kilometres from Vindonissa, on the outskirts of Windisch, there is the Goshawk Fortress (in German Habichtsburg), the castle that gave its name to the Habsburg dynasty. The complex was built around 1020 on the River Aar by Count Radbot von Klettgau who elected it as the residence of the Habsburgs, one of the most influential and powerful dynasties in European history whose empire rapidly expanded to include – among others – African, Asian and American colonies. According to legend, the Count erected the castle with no walls, moat or defence towers, since he relied upon his soldiers' and subjects' loyalty to defend it.

Augusta Raurica, the oldest documented Roman colony ever established on the Rhine, is located near Basel and was founded around 44 BC by Caesar's deputy, the Roman consul Lucius Munatius Plancus, in an area inhabited by the local Gaulish tribe of the Raurici. The museum of the site houses an invaluable silver treasure and the reconstruction of a typical Roman villa. *Augusta Raurica* (Augst) was linked to the Roman road that led to *Vesontio* (Besançon) in France. The road from *Augusta Raurica* – after *Salodurum* (Soleure) and *Petinesca* (Studen) – went south of Lake Neuchâtel and through *Aventicum* (Avenches), the capital of the Helvetii; it then continued to *Eburodunum* (Yverdon-les -Bains) and *Abiolica* (Pontarlier) to finally reach *Vesontio* (Besançon).

4 - Tin findings of the Late Bronze Age have been discovered on the northern coast of Lake Neuchâtel in the municipalities of Hauterive-Champréveyres, Auvernier-Nord, Cortaillod-Est, Bevaix, Concise, Grandson-Corcelettes and Onnens. Amber beads of the same age, sun crosses, aquatic birds, double spirals and "antenna swords" have also been found in the area. However, the funerary customs of the lake area remain a mystery

and we do not yet know how funeral rites were performed (we cannot actually say whether the ashes were thrown into the lake or differently preserved). After a long settlement around Lake Neuchâtel, in 850 BC the population abandoned their pile dwellings and decided to move to the hills due to several reasons, among which the most important were a water level rise and a decrease of the bronze production (Bronze/Iron Age transition). Findings of the Bronze Age include pottery fragments with fingerprint decorations, a technique also found on bronze cups and aquatic bird collars.

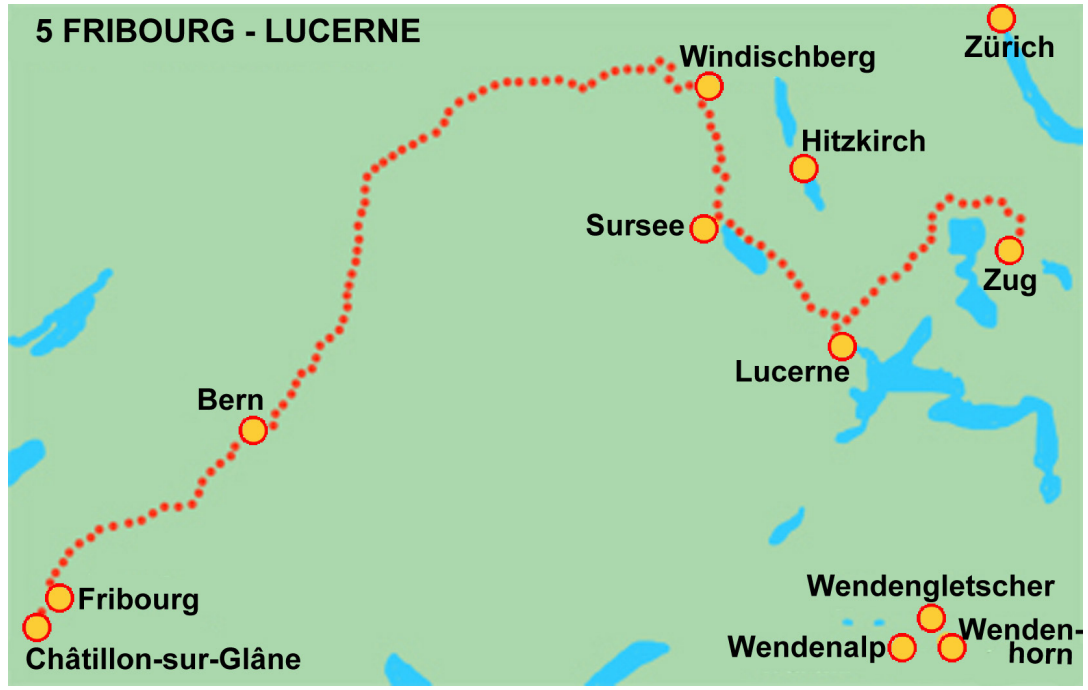
Marsh bird with fingerprints around the neck, Late Bronze Age

In Neuchâtel, the Laténium is Switzerland's largest archaeological museum: it hosts a permanent exhibition of 3,000 items and almost half a million finds yet to be catalogued and inventoried. The Laténium took its name from the Celtic village of La Tène: most of the findings from this site are stored here, as well as at the New Museum of Biel/Bienne, the bilingual city on the French-German watershed of the Bielersee, whose museum contains the Schwab collection.

The La Tène culture (480-30 BC) developed in the Iron Age out of the Hallstatt culture without any gap since it flourished under the impetus of the Greek and Etruscan influence. According to Herodotus, the *keltoi* were indeed a population situated at the source of the Danube River, on the border with Northern Switzerland. The La Tène culture is emblematic of the Celtic evolutionary development which then spread across Eastern France, South-Western Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, England, Ireland, Austria and Northern Italy.

The hilly area around Lake Neuchâtel turns into a completely different landscape at the border between the Vaud and Neuchâtel cantons where tourists may admire the "Creux du Van", a massive natural rocky arena in which 150 m-tall walls encircle a breathtaking valley basin. The rock originated from the lime deposits of a prehistoric sea dating back to about 200 millions of years ago and has been reshaped by glaciers and brooks. Its steep walls thus provide a detailed insight into the geology of the Jura Mountains. The mild microclimate of the area guarantees the proliferation of woods and arctic-alpine flora and fauna: chamois, ibex and lynx inhabit the pristine landscape of this protected wildlife reserve. The spring of Fontaine Froide bubbles out of the rocks amid the valley basin and its cold waters maintain a temperature of 4° C during the year. The arena may be either reached on foot from the small town of Noiraigue (725 m difference in altitude) or by car following a paved road route which starts from the villages of St-Aubin or Travers and leads to Soliat, a 300 m walk to the "Creux du Van" rocky arena.

5 - Finds collected in the archaeological site of Châtillon-sur-Glâne are displayed at the Museum of Friburg. After Bern – the amber city – we come across Windischberg, another



Venetic toponym. Then other significant traces of tin from the late Bronze Age can be found in the municipalities of Sursee, Hitzkirch and Zug. The Museum of Prehistory of Zug provides visitors with a detailed insight into the ancient history of the Canton of Zug and, although it does not have findings from the tin route, it is very child-friendly.

On St. Martin's Day, a lot of people gather in Sursee in order to celebrate the ritual of Gansabhauet, whose origins are unclear but might date back to the Late Middle Ages when feasts were celebrated on the day in which part of the harvest was given to the abbeys. The rite mysteriously disappeared from the festival calendar in 1820 but was then revived 43 years later. Every year on November 11th, the archaic ritual – which recalls ancient fowl-related ceremonies widespread all over Europe in the past – is performed in front of many spectators. During the ceremony, a dead goose is suspended from the back of its head and those who are brave enough have to sever its neck with a blunt sabre. Wearing a golden sun mask and a red cloak, participants are blindfolded by a pointed cap which covers their face: they have to behead the goose by striking a single blow. Should they manage to do it, the ceremony ends with a sumptuous feast.

The Gansabhauet ritual: blindfolded participants test the position of the goose before severing its neck with a blunt sabre.

Lacus Venetus

Lake Neuchâtel

Lacustrine village (1000 BC)

The Laténium Museum in Neuchâtel

Vindonissa

Habsburg

Sursee

Rhine Falls

THE SALT ROUTE

A detailed description of salt production by means of evaporation basins is contained in the *De Reditu Suo sive Iter Gallicum*, written in the 5th century AD by the Roman imperial poet Rutilius Claudius Namatianus. The salt route closely intertwined with the tin route: it proceeded from Salzburg, well-known for rock salt extraction, to the Spondigna-Mallesal intersection in the Venosta Valley and headed to Glurns, which was proclaimed a city by Roman decree and was situated at a junction between Via Claudia Augusta and the ancient commercial route toward Switzerland. The route then led to the Resia Pass, descended to Malles and ascended to the small village of Tubre, connecting Engadine and the Rhone Valley to Martigny (just at the foot of the Great St. Bernard Pass).

The ancient salt route joined Salzburg also with Concordia Sagittaria, a small town near Venice, passing through Pieve di Fagagna in the Friuli region. It is common to find traces of the Venetic traders along the entire salt route, both in the *Venetia's* lagoon and in the Atlantic Sea, namely in Brittany (village of Guérande) and South Wales (Gwent). In his famous letter to the tribunes, the Roman prefect Cassiodorus described a vibrant community that lived like aquatic birds on islands reclaimed from the sea and whose economy was chiefly based on fishing and incomes earned with salt extraction. Furthermore, the surname *Salinator* recurs several times in some inscriptions pertaining to the *Venetia*: for example, *P(ublius) Salin(ator)* appears on the fragment of a decorated funerary stele probably from Oderzo (reused in Cittanova during the Middle Ages) and again a *Titus Helvius Salinator* was found on a now-missing epigraph discovered in Tarvisium (present-day Treviso).

Salt extraction in the Venetian lagoon was then attested again in the 10th century: the decadence of the city of Comacchio – which was ravaged twice by the Venetians (first in 682 and then in 932) – freed up trade on the Po Valley market in favour of the salt produced by Venice, which exploited the salt mines located along the access ways to this market (especially those of the Po and Adige rivers).

Archaeological evidence of salt production has also been found south of Trieste, in the ancient proto-historical fortified borough of Elleri (Bronze Age). The series of three-pronged bases here found were used to sustain the moulds filled with the saline compound during salt evaporation and were of the same kind of those discovered later on in the marshy coasts of Brittany (La Téne period). It seems that the preparatory operations of salt production, such as the settling and the concentration of the liquid solution, took place seasonally between the summer and the beginning of autumn. The saline mixture was then pressed into moulds and heated to cause evaporation until completely dried and crystallised. At the end of the process, the salt blocks were extracted from the moulds and ready to be sold. In the Iron Age, the salt from Muggia Bay proved to be a major source of income in the pre-Roman marketplace of Trieste – the ancient *Tergeste* between the hill of Cattinara and the coastline of Stramare.

Just near the Slovenian border, in Portoroz, it is possible to visit the Sečovlje salt flats located in the country's biggest moist nature park (6.5 km^2).

THE LOST CITY OF VINETA

On the Baltic Sea in present-day Pomerania (Germany), Vineta was the most important port of the Wends. Like that of Venice, its foundation is lost in the mists of time, perhaps in the 6th century; its maritime apogee is placed between the 10th and the 12th century, at the middle of the latter must have taken place its sudden end. In 965 the Arab Ibrahim ibn Jaqub – emissary of the Caliph of Córdoba – described Vineta as rich and densely populated city, granary of Constantinople and, with its twelve gates, a great port whose military power "was superior to that of all the Nordic peoples". Indeed a lot of merchants coming from Byzantium, Kiev (Ukraine) and Novgorod (Russia) reached it for business reasons.

According to legend, Vineta sunk under the stormy rage of a deluge, a sort of divine punishment for "the city's indecency, arrogance and extravagant opulence". A portent had warned the city three months, three weeks and three days before the flood, in an attempt to make the inhabitants repent. Bright colourful lights circled over the sea and created a mirage of the town with all its towers, buildings and walls. Such a vision should have convinced the inhabitants to leave but, despite the warning and lacking any humbleness, they did not take it as a sign of bad omen. Nor did they consider the last warning, a couple of weeks later, when a mermaid emerged from the sea and repeated three times in a threatening voice:

"Vineta, Vineta! You rich city shall go down, because your inhabitants are evil".

As a result, the city was submerged by floodwater and even today church bells are thought to be heard from the depth of the sea.

Granted that Vineta was submerged by water or covered by sand, did this happen only for natural causes? Or did it slowly happen over time, after that the city had already been destroyed by human violence and then forgotten? Legend has it that only two fishermen survived the Wends. How can such a densely populated city have suddenly disappeared without leaving trace in the Baltic coast and in the memory of historians? When was Vineta destroyed? Who or what really destroyed the city? A true limit of historians – both ancient and modern – is to rely only on written sources. What has not been reported does not exist for them. But this is not always the case. Probably, the truth about Vineta has never been written, but cunningly substituted by legend.

In order to understand the historical context, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the history of the Wends and the sentiments of their enemies both before and after the destruction of Vineta. Charlemagne, *Carolus serenissimus augustus a Deo coronatus magnus pacificus*, was the first emperor to declare war to the Slavs: in 805 he pushed the army of the Franks against the Cichu-Windones, the Wends of Bohemia who had settled along the amber route that followed the Vltava River. Exterminated by the Franks, they were labelled as "runts" or "tangle of worms" by the monastic chronicles.

Otto I the Great (912-973), of the Saxon Liudolfings, was crowned in Aachen in 936 as *Rex gratia Dei* and his coronation speech went as follows: "Receive this sword with

which you shall cast out all the enemies of Christ, both pagans and heretics, and receive with it the authority and power given to you by God to rule over the Franks for the security of all Christian people". Following Charlemagne's footsteps, king Otto I struck a close alliance with the Catholic Church and managed to extend his kingdom further east. As a matter of fact, he first submitted the Slavic tribes between the Elbe and Oder rivers and then proceeded to wipe out all of the Wends except for the Sorbs, a population whose descendants have survived up to now in Lusatia (between Germany and Poland).

This German emperor did not shun from any form of corruption, betrayal or killing to enslave not only the princes he had defeated, but all of the Wends. Indeed, "Wend" had become synonymous with "pagan". Since there were no churches beyond the Oder but only pagan temples and sacred woods, Otto I brought a contingent of clergymen with him as he advanced with his army. The illegitimate son he had from a Slav aristocrat prisoner when he was still an adolescent, was to become the Archbishop of Mainz. In 955 Otto I's army defeated another Wendish tribe, the Obodrites: the battle took place on the Raxa River (maybe present-day Recknitz) in Eastern Mecklenburg and not far from Vineta. Seven hundred prisoners were beheaded in front of the head of prince Stojgnef stuck on a spear. Brutally, the same grim fate was faced by the Prince's counsellor whose eyes and tongue were literally torn out and who was left to die in agony among a pile of corpses.

Between the 11th and 12th century, the Inquisition was set up to punish heretics and in 1119 Pope Callixtus II forcefully entrusted the king with such a task. In 1179 the Third Lateran Council convoked by Pope Alexander III drew up precise guidelines for the annihilation of heresies and threatened with excommunication the holders of secular power who refused to obey the Church.

Six chivalric orders were sent to fight against the pagan populations of North-eastern Europe. "Baptism or Death" was the slogan of the crusade led in 1147 against the Wends by the French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (now venerated as a saint by the Catholics). Pushed by a great thirst to conquer new lands, the Saxons saw a great opportunity in the evangelizing mission, which they exploited to build up an enthusiastic army of almost 100,000 men, later joined by the Danish fleet. Nevertheless, the northern armada was defeated at the Doblin fortress, while the southern armada – led by Albert the Bear – advanced only slightly using the scorched earth policy, without being able to achieve a full victory over the Wends.

The events that occurred in the aftermath of Vineta's destruction seem therefore to depict a defenceless population overcome by its attackers. The Wends suffered atrocious losses due to the Saxons' advance eastward, which was aimed at the complete colonization and settlement of the Slavic lands. In the 12th century, at least 200,000 German peasants moved further east in the area between the Elbe and Saale rivers. The Wends who managed to escape the massacre were reduced to slavery, submerged with taxes or forced to retreat to the marshes, where they barely made a living from fishing. Whenever they were caught in isolated areas, they risked being hung without a reason. Furthermore, many of the Germanized Wends were obliged to fight against their own native tribes in order to speed up the colonization process of the East. Such a substitution of peoples through the killing of the native Wends can be labelled as genocide, a slaughter long forgotten and removed from individual conscience.

Unfortunately, there are no direct sources that record Vineta's mysterious disappearance. The Saxon Helmold of Bosau, despite being the first historian to mention the city, does not tell us when Vineta was destroyed. He might, however, be the closest to the truth of its unclear fate. In his *Chronica Slavorum* he deals with major events that occurred between 1167 – when he started writing – and 1171, when the city was already destroyed. He maintains that "a Danish fleet attacked and destroyed the prosperous city by order of a Danish king. Still visible are its ruins". Who was this mysterious king? It is quite reasonable to infer that he must have been a very powerful and bellicose monarch with a big fleet. It is well-known that there was an ancient commercial rivalry between the Scandinavian Vikings and the Wends: around 808, the Danes led by King Göttrik had already destroyed the port of the Wendish tribe of the Obodrites in an attempt to gain control over the Baltic Sea.

Here is a shortlist of the Danish kings who might have caused Vineta's destruction.

Magnus I (1024 - 1047) conquered the Wendish city of Wolin in 1043, burned down its defence walls and ravaged its surroundings. The German Medieval chronicler Adam of Bremen estimated that at least 15,000 Wends died in the conflict, while Snorri Sturluson – another Medieval historian – described the Battle of Lyrskov Heath as a most tremendous carnage. The slaughter carried out by Sweyn, on the orders of Magnus, completely annihilated the military power of the Wends who ceased to be a threat to the Danish kingdom. According to the *Nnytlinga Saga*, King Magnus would have conquered and reduced the city of Wolin / Jomsborg to ashes, just like the rest of the country. Although some tend to identify Wolin with the mysterious Vineta, the real Vineta could not have been permanently destroyed in 1043, since in 1076 Adam of Bremen reported it as being a flourishing commercial city.

Sweyn II Estridsson Ulfsson (ca. 1018 - 1076) was a literate and he is the source of most of our knowledge about Denmark in the 9th and 10th centuries, since he provided Adam of Bremen with the information about his ancestors.

Harald Hen the Whetstone (1041 - 1080) was scorned by medieval chroniclers, among whom Saxo Grammaticus, as a weak and ineffective king who yielded to the will of the common people.

Canute IV byname Canute the Holy (1043 - 1086) vigorously attempted to increase royal power in Denmark during his reign.

Olaf I (1050 - 1095) had to face the country's severe famine during his reign.

Eric I byname Eric the Evergood (ca. 1055 - 1103) liked to party and led quite a dissolute life.

Niels of Denmark (ca. 1064 - 1134) was a beloved king whose reign was mainly characterised by internal peace.

Eric II the Memorable (ca. 1090 - 1137) was a harsh and unpopular king.

Eric III the Lamb (1100 / 1105 - 1146) was an incompetent king. After his death, a series of events led to the outbreak of a civil war that lasted 10 years.

*Svantevit – from the Slavonic root *svet ('light') – the Wendish god of light whose sacred symbol was a white horse.*
Irena Urankar, Veles Grafika, Ljubljana.

Sweyn III Grathe (1125-1157) managed to split the kingdom into Jutland, Zealand and Scania and proclaimed himself great ruler of Scania with the German military support. At the peace banquet of Roskilde (1157) he tried to kill his two co-rulers (Valdemar and Canute), an incident which later became known as the "Blood banquet of Roskilde".

Valdemar I byname the Great was King of Denmark from 1157 until his death in 1182. He might have destroyed Vineta between 1157 and 1171, the *Chronica Slavorum's* limits, more than 200 years after the Caliph of Córdoba had praised the city as a prosperous economic centre. Valdemar's father was killed a few days before he was born and his mother decided to name him after her grandfather, Vladimir Monomakh, the Grand Prince of Kiev. As an heir to the throne, Valdemar was raised at the Court of Asser Rig of Fjenneslev together with Absalon, Asser's son. As previously stated, in 1157 King Sweyn hosted a great banquet for Canute, Absalon and Valdemar with the clear intent to get rid of all of his rivals. The king murdered Canute but Absalon and Valdemar managed to escape death and fled to Jutland. The two became very close friends and cooperated to achieve further expansion of the kingdom. Absalon was then elected bishop and forced Valdemar to declare war on the Wends by maintaining that the latter were raiding the Danish coasts.

Almost every year, for 25 years, the Danish king sent military ships against the Wends. The first campaign led by Valdemar and Absalon began in the summer of 1159: the king

Absalon (with the cross) and King Valdemar I (left with the sword) tilt Svantevit's statue in Cape Arkona. Mural in Frederiksborg Castle (Hillerød) frescoed by the Danish painter Laurits Regner Tuxen, 1890

and his implacable counsellor crossed the Warnow River and reached Rostock where they set fire to the city and ravaged the whole area up to Barth, the province mentioned by the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus.

On the island of Rügen, the pagan stronghold of Cape Arkona – the refuge of Svantevit, a four-faced god similar to the Vedic Brahmā – surrendered to the Danes only in 1168. The Wends had to accept Danish sovereignty and were forced to convert to Christianity. Proceeding by sea, that same year Absalon reached Garz, another stronghold of the Wends' army in the south of Rügen Island. The unexpected fall of Arkona had shocked the garrison so much that it surrendered unconditionally at the sight of the Danish fleet. The tale, probably falsified because of its apologetic intent, goes: "Absalon disembarked with only 12 warriors and passed between a double row of 6,000 Wendish soldiers to enter the gates of the fortress and reach the temple of the seven-headed god Rugievit." The idol was hewn down, dragged forth and triumphantly burnt. The entire population of Garz was baptised and Absalon laid the foundations of twelve churches on the island of Rügen. He continued to keep the Baltic area under control and in 1170 he proceeded further east and destroyed the village of Dziwnów on the island of Wolin, an area then still inhabited by the Wends. On the basis of all these assumptions, if we exclude King Magnus for Wolin's destruction while Vineta was flourishing, King Valdemar and Bishop Absalon are the only two suspects who could have been responsible for Vineta's annihilation.

The fall of Arkona and Garz left Barth's province (between Recknitz River and Rügen Island) defenceless.

The exact location of Vineta is still unknown and searches for the sunken city are still underway. According to the medieval Icelandic saga *Jómsvíkinga*, the city should be situated between Germany and Poland. Ancient sources identify the cities destroyed at the estuary of the River Oder with different names: Jomsborg, Jumne, Iumneta, Vimne and Julin (Luijania in Arab by Ibn Said al-Garnati). Vineta may thus be placed in a delimited area located behind Cape Arkona, the long and narrow promontory on the island of Rügen. Let's briefly examine the hypotheses regarding Vineta's sinking and their sustaining arguments:

Koserow - According to a legend, Vineta would have sunk around the mouth of the Oder River just opposite Koserow, a settlement of Wendish origin on the island of Usedom. This thesis was chiefly supported by the historian W. F. Gadebusch, who also maintained that Vineta could not have been a major port for big ships due to its low sea bottom.

Ruden - The origins of this connection are quite controversial. Several maps published between 1633 and 1700 placed Vineta in the island of Ruden, at the mouth of Peene River, and the theologian Bernhard Walther Marperger localised it in the same place around 1700. The misunderstanding about Vineta and Ruden can be related to the storm surge of 1304, known as the "All Saints' Flood", which devastated the island and flooded the peninsula between Ruden and Mönchgut, in the south of Rügen Island.

In the caption, Vineta destroyed by a Danish King

Jumne - Could have been Jomsborg at the time of Arnold I and Sweyn I of Denmark. The city had prospered thanks to the amber trade. In the 11th century Adam of Bremen called it "Jumne" and described it as one of the biggest and most powerful cities in Europe, a flourishing commercial city popular among the Greeks and the Barbarians. Its exact position is still unknown but many believe that it was located somewhere near the islands of the Oder estuary. Jomsborg (from *joma*, 'the great lagoon') might be identified with the current city of Wolin, in the south-west of the island of Wolin, or at least be related to its surroundings.

Damerow - In his 16th century *Chronicon Saxoniae* the historian David Chyträus localised Vineta in Damerow, a fortification established opposite Koserow and beyond the River Peene. Some scholar maintained that Damerow was the land of the Wends who inhabited the island of Usedom, while the island of Wolin – where there was the city of Julin – was the land of the Pomeranian tribe of Wolinians.

Wolin - According to the Pomeranian doctor and anthropologist Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), Wolin had once been a rich and powerful city populated by 10,000 inhabitants. Excavations carried out since the 1930s by German and Polish archaeologists have proven that between the 10th and 12th centuries the city was indeed an important urban settlement with an eminent square for naval commerce. As already stated before, Vineta could not have been destroyed in 1043 since Adam of Bremen quoted it in 1076. However, Wolin could have recovered from the attack launched against the Wends by Magnus I in 1043 because a century later (in 1170) another military campaign against the city – which was totally destroyed this time – was organised by Valdemar I. Having established this king as our alleged destroyer of Vineta, the dispute around the identification of the city remains, nonetheless, still open: Wolin or Barth was the mysterious vanished city?

Barth - The archaeologist Klaus Goldmann and the journalist Günter Wermusch placed Vineta in the medieval town of Barth, 150 km west of Wolin within the current German border. According to the German researchers, Vineta was situated at the mouth of the Oder, probably in a branch now filled with soil, which anciently flowed into the Anklam and Demmine. Its bed, like that of the Peene (which once did not flow into the Stettiner Haff), formed a navigable river which probably flowed from the main segment of the Oder along the Welse, through the Uecker and Randow basins, the Friedländer Große Wiese, the Großer Landgraben and Tollense valleys to Friedland. The analysis of the level ratios seems to confirm the hypothesis that the site of Barth situated near the subterranean branch could be the ancient Vineta. In 1159 the term "Barthan province" was used after the battles against the Wends and could be linked with the word "bardo", which indicated 'a small hill' in the Pomeranian or Polabian languages; in fact, in 1256 we find it written as either "Bard" or "Barth". Apparently, King Valdemar I destroyed and burnt the entire area up to the province of Barth (quoted by Saxo) in the summer of 1159. If it is true that Vineta has to be identified with Barth as Goldman suggested, then Valdemar's attack against that area could have been the first attempt to conquer the surroundings of Barth, while the city would have fallen after Cape Arkona.

Which conclusions can thus be drawn? Vineta could not have disappeared all of a sudden and we can assume that the inhabitants had sufficient building technology to avoid

it from sinking. The city was certainly not hit by a tsunami since the area could not be classified as a seismic zone. The most plausible hypothesis is that Vineta was razed to the ground and its inhabitants exterminated in order to take possession of their treasures. Currently there is no conclusive evidence to support this hypothesis, however it is well-known that the Crusaders or the Teutonic knights used to mass murder the Baltic populations and reduce the few who survived to slavery. Some researchers maintain that Vineta's sinking was caused by the hydrographic changes that occurred among the tributaries of the Oder delta. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that the city sank due to natural causes in a period during which the Wends were systematically persecuted and attacked by a powerful fleet. It is, instead, plausible that after being completely destroyed and uninhabited the city was covered with sand. If ever the remains of the city's wooden palaces (probably burnt) are discovered, it will be possible to verify if there are or aren't traces of a new settlement after the fire.

Just like the Great Flood in the Bible cleansed human beings from wickedness, in the legend Vineta was punished because it failed to accept the Christian faith and to reject paganism. Some elements in the legend (i.e., the warnings) also seem to justify the destruction of the city because of its immorality. The great wealth the city had accumulated through the amber trade certainly attracted the envy of the Crusaders and the looters, who needed a justification for their attacks. They found such a justification not in the attempt to covert the inhabitants, but in the final punishment of those who refused to listen to the divine warnings. To some extent, Vineta's fate may be seen as an anticipation of the so-called *Requerimiento* ('injunction'), that is, the sovereignty statement read by Spanish conquistadors to unsuspecting natives of the New World.

Is it risky to assume that the first Christian chroniclers deliberately removed Vineta's destruction? Someone may have deleted from the annals all references to Valdemar I's attacks to Vineta between 1168 and 1171 during the Christianizing crusades against the Wends. Even the ten volumes of the ecclesiastical encyclopaedias published in 1854 and 1938 did not mention the Crusades led against the Wends. It is significant that the most relevant information about the legendary golden city of Vineta, also called the Atlantis of the North, comes from the Saxon chronicler Helmold of Bosau who had provided a detailed description of Slavic deities like Svantevit and Živa, the goddess of life. About the desire to eliminate the Wends, a people who had already been conquered and paid precious taxes, Helmold wrote: "Is not the land we are devastating our land? Aren't the people we are fighting our people? Why then do we behave like our enemies and we destroy our very income?".

The oldest depiction of Barth (1590)

In his *Chronikon Livoniae* (ca. 1225) Henricus de Lettis describes a contemporaneous tribe which he calls the Vendi: "At that time the Vendi were a poor and humble tribe who had settled in Livonia on Mons Antiqua, where Riga is situated, after having been expelled from the River Venta, in Courland. They were then again expelled from the mountain by the Curonians and many were killed. Those who survived found refuge among the Latvians and have lived among them since".

What can be inferred from this description is that the Vendi originally inhabited the peninsula which in the west was crossed by the River Venta (at whose mouth there is present-day Ventspils). They were most probably prosperous sea traders who had been tremendously impoverished in the 11th century because of the systematic persecutions led by the Curonians, a fearsome Baltic tribe of sea pirates that lived along the coasts. These Vendi populations thus moved from Courland to Livonia – the historic region situated on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Riga (bounded by the northern coast of Latvia and the western coast of Estonia) – and settled in the village of Wenden, the current Cēsis. The medieval Cēsis Castle is located at the foot of the Vidzeme upland, the hilly area quoted as *Mons Antiqua* by Henricus de Lettis in his chronicle.

Wenden Castle, Cēsis (Latvia)

According to the Polish historian Ochmański, the Vendi were the descendants of the Vistula Veneti, a population who managed to take control of the northernmost area of the Baltic Sea. As a matter of fact, Courland represented a safe landing point for all the seafarers sailing from the Vistula River. Nevertheless, archaeological data do not fully clarify the actual origins of this tribe: the Vendi have been identified with almost all the local tribes of the time, i.e., the Eastern Slavs, the Semigallians, the Curonians, the Livonians and the Voti. Although it is commonly believed today that archaeological finds "alone" are not sufficient to identify the ethnic affiliation of those to whom the finding belonged, it is nevertheless interesting to notice that the same kind of multi-faced miniatures (like those of the three-headed god Triglav) were found both in Riga and in the Polish area of Wolin. The Slavic philologist Max Vasmer maintains that the Vendi could be reckoned as a Finno-Ugric population on the basis of the similar toponyms found also in Estonia, like *Wendau*, *Vonnie*, *Wenden*, *Wendrama*, *Weneküla* and *Wenn*. However, in Balto-Finnish languages the term *vondlane* means 'foreign', as if the Vendi were not considered a local tribe by Baltic people. In modern Latvian the term used to refer to the market square (*tirgus*) preserves the same base of the Venetic *Opitergium* (Oderzo, a municipality located

Curland and Livonia

near Treviso) or of *Tergeste* (the city of Trieste). Furthermore, the Western Dvina River which flows in Riga has the same **dn* root of several Venetic hydronyms. The practice of cremation arrived in the peninsula of the Dvina River around 1100 BC: here the ashes were not kept in urns but stacked in small heaps (Rezne necropolis).

The first attempt to convert the Livonians to the Christian faith was made by Meinhard, bishop of the town of Ikšķiles – whose church and castle were built in his honour. When Meinhard died in 1196, the crusades were temporarily interrupted and the local people renounced the new religion. Meinhard's evangelization was then replaced by that of Berthold, a bishop from Lower Saxony who at the beginning was almost lynched. Nonetheless he returned with an army following the tenets of St. Bernard, the founder of Cistercian order, that is: "Go on the attack unscrupulous, you knights, and repel the foes of the cross with a brave heart". Under duress, mass baptisms were held, but – when the army left – the Vendi washed off the sign of baptism in the River Dvina, raided the churches and expelled the priests.

In 1199 Albert of Livonia, the Bishop of Riga, led a fleet of twenty-three vessels along the Dvina River on a second crusade against the Vendi, which was compared to that of the Holy Land in the bull of Pope Innocence III (who mentioned the Vendi). The first riots were soon followed by a peace agreement, which was nevertheless soon violated when the bishop decided to arrest the elderly people of the village and take thirty of their sons hostage. Albert built up his permanent army of German knights, the so called "Livonian Brothers of the Sword", who wore a white cloak with a red sword painted under the Templar cross. They were required to take vows of obedience, poverty and celibacy. Albert instead managed to gain an immense exclusive power over Livonia and Courland, the first lands owned by a chivalric order in the early Middle Ages. These knights held several castles – in Riga, Segewold, Fellin, Dorpat and Odenpäh – but they established their headquarters in the fortress of Wenden. Due to its strategic position and military effectiveness, this castle withstood the attacks of the Estonians and the Russians. From it the converted Vendi were forced to leave with the Brothers of the Sword in order to embark on other crusades against pagans. The Vendi of Wenden Castle were the creators of the Latvian national flag, the second oldest flag in Europe.

For the sake of clarity, it has to be pointed out that the chapters on the crusades against the Wends have been written with the aim to disclose historical truth and should not be considered as a form of anticlericalism by the author. If it is true that many massacres were caused in the name of Christian religion, it is equally true that mass crimes against powerless populations have also been perpetrated by modern atheist governments. Communist dictatorships are indeed thought to have contributed in the world to the overall killing of at least a hundred million people who opposed the regimes: Stalin's victims alone have been estimated around twenty million and the same figure most probably applies to Mao. Unconditioned historical objectivity thus has the high moral task of reminding us of the atrocities committed because of intolerance in the past and of promoting that kind of tolerance which is now part of our common sense and safeguarded by supranational organizations. Although it is difficult to expect that the evangelical precept of unconditional love toward the other can be achieved, we can at least strive toward tolerating other human beings despite our different beliefs.

There are no sources on the evangelization of the ancient Veneti. The heavy persecutions inflicted upon pagans in Europe are unknown to the majority of us since historians either tend to ignore these phenomena or prefer not to mention them at all. The same might be applied to the decimation of Native Americans and the extermination of Aboriginal Australians, as well as to the incitement to the massacres the Spanish perpetrated against pre-Columbian civilizations. Since Christianity does not glorify violence, it is obvious that in the past religion itself was "a mere pretext" to increase a kingdom's power and accumulate wealth. This was possible because, unlike paganism, Christianity had the prerogative of being the one and only true faith, thereby discarding all other faiths as false. Since its earliest origins, Christianity had already tried to unify the faith into a single vision in order to dissipate the confusion arising from the multiple versions of the gospels, which reported different stories about Jesus and his words. Finally, the Gospels were reduced to four, assigned arbitrarily to the four Evangelists.

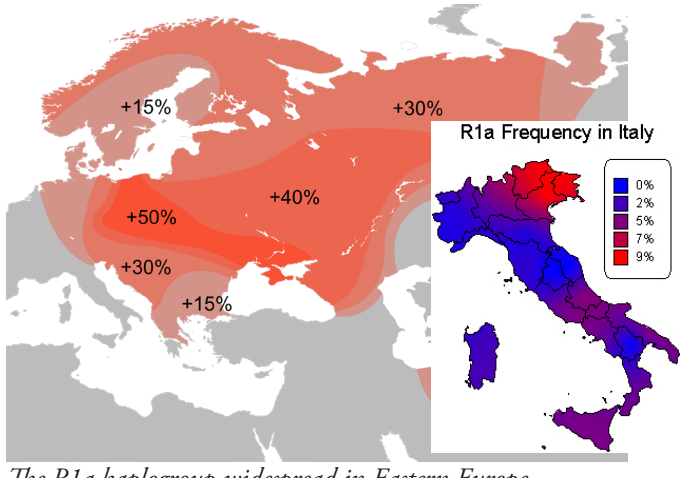
Gnostic texts also gradually ceased to be considered official, despite their mystic and fascinating accounts. According to Gnosticism, human beings are *drops of light* which stem from Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom and the key feminine entity of the doctrine. As the souls fluctuate out of Chaos, they become unaware of their true nature. Only Christ the Saviour can help them recover a full consciousness of their real essence as light. This idea bears some resemblance with modern physics: in our memory we all preserve traces of the ineffable Creation of the universe, because – in our most intimate essence – we were all already present there. As Gnostic doctrine itself suggests, everything is stored in our memory and our cosmic imprinting has not been erased, so all we have to do is find a way to let it emerge.

DNA Genealogy studies the molecular history of DNA by analysing the mutations of the chromosome Y in males and mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) in females and males. Amazingly, all females can be traced back to a single woman – the so-called "scientific Eva" – who dates back to 140,000 years ago, while the male counterpart (the so-called "scientific Adam") goes back to only 60,000 years ago. Archaeogenetics, a term coined by Colin Renfrew, is a branch of DNA genealogy whose aim is to reconstruct the migration process and describe the evolutionary stages of ancient populations. The haplogroup R1a, for instance, is remarkably widespread in Eastern and Central Europe and its clades (subgroups consisting of a common ancestor and its lineal descendants) might be useful to explain which kind of relationship existed among the Venetic lineages scattered around Europe.

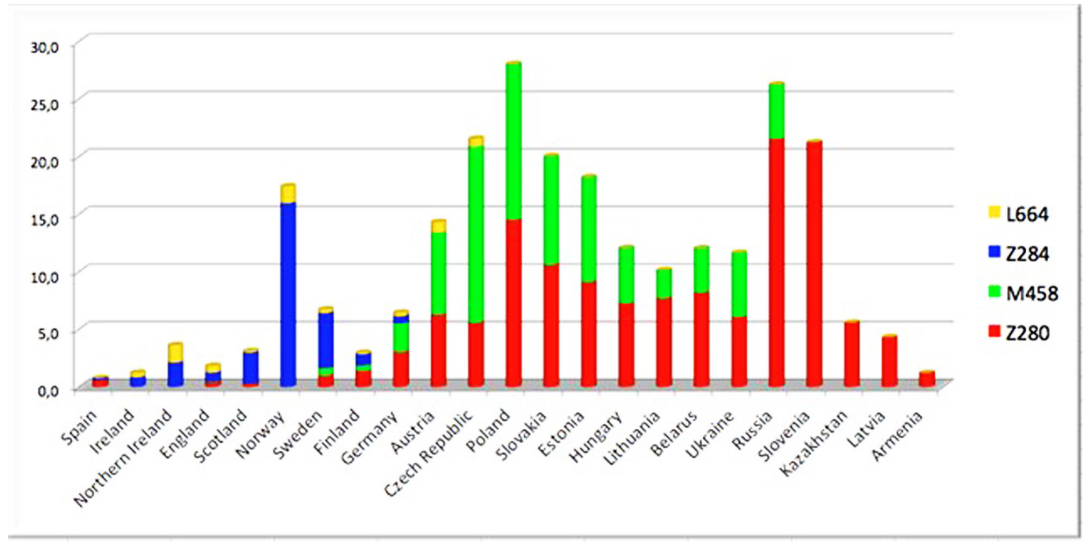
The relation between the Veneti and the Slavs is still highly controversial: it is, in fact, yet unclear whether the two terms are synonymous, whether the two populations derive from the same lineage or from different lineages and whether the Veneti gave origin to the Slavs or vice versa. The Veneti were probably known to the ancient world from the 2nd millennium BC onwards and the term *Veneti* is certainly more ancient than the word *Slavs*, which was first attested in the Byzantine era. On the basis of archaeological evidence, Florin Curta believes that the Slavic identity is a mere invention of the Byzantines. Jadranka Gvozdanović, on the other hand, found proof in ancient texts that the Veneti and the Slavs were two separate and distinct groups and that the Veneti were predominant (since **uen-* in Slavonic means 'big').

A recent study carried out by Marta Mielnik-Sikorska has shed light on the Slavic identity by sequencing 63 mitochondrial DNA samples with H5 and H6 haplogroups. The data collected seems to exclude the migration theory (sustained by Soviet propaganda) according to which the Slavs began to occupy the territories of Central Europe at the beginning of the 6th century. It seems, instead, that the significant changes that occurred in European material culture in the 5th century were not the result of extended demographic shifts, but were rather the result of a continuity in maternal and paternal lineages between the Bronze Age and the early Middle Ages.

The Lusatian civilization developed mainly in Poland during the late Bronze Age: the majority of Polish people presents the clades Z280 and M458, which are both subgroups of the R1a haplogroup. Unluckily, due to cremation processes, we lack data on Lusatian DNA, that is, on "certified" bones.



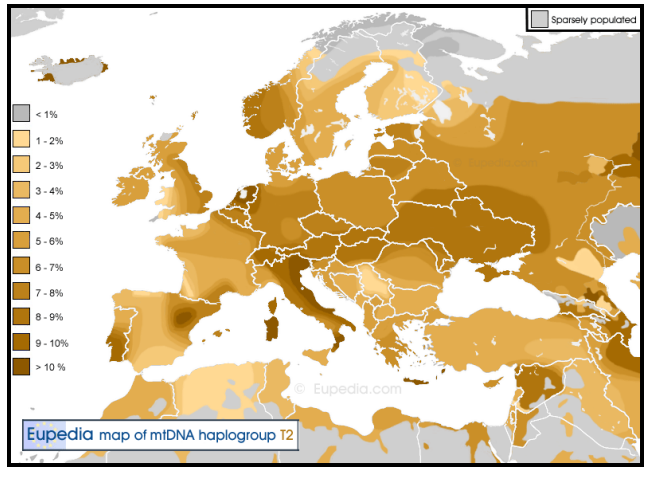
The R1a haplogroup widespread in Eastern Europe



Significant are the subgroups Z280 and M458 (also known as R1a1a7) in Poland. The small percentage of Z280 found in Veneto is of Balto-Slavic origin.

The R1a-Z280 haplogroup is a Balto-Slavic marker extensively found across Central-Eastern Europe (except for the Balkans) and limited in the western part of Europe to Eastern Germany, Slovenia and North-Eastern Italy. This genetic link from the Baltic to the Adriatic is further confirmed by the fact that in most cases the Z280 of the Veneto region belongs to the subgroup CTS3402, which can be associated with the Balto-Slavs and both the Trzciniec and Lusatian cultures. According to Maciano, a percentage of 6.5% of the rare L haplogroup is present in Veneto and, with the exception of the neighbouring regions of Friuli and Trentino, this haplogroup is almost completely absent in the rest of Italy. The high percentage of the L haplogroup in North-Eastern Italy is also confirmed by Alessio Boattini's charts and by the Eupedia website, which places it at 3.5%. Since the L2 haplogroup (M317) is also present in Anatolia, we still need to determine whether the percentage of this haplogroup found in Veneto is "indigenous" from the Neolithic or whether it was brought from Anatolia.

The presence of J2 in Veneto matches with the Hungarian Kyjatice sample, that belongs to J2a1b-Z30685 and is believed to be a local variety of the Lusatian culture. As far as the mtDNA is concerned, T2 is mostly present in Veneto (18.8%); it seems to be also found in the Unetice culture of Central Europe and, before, in the Yamna culture of Ukraine.



T2 haplogroup (mtDNA), from http://www.eupedia.com

R1a Clades

(by main SNP markers)

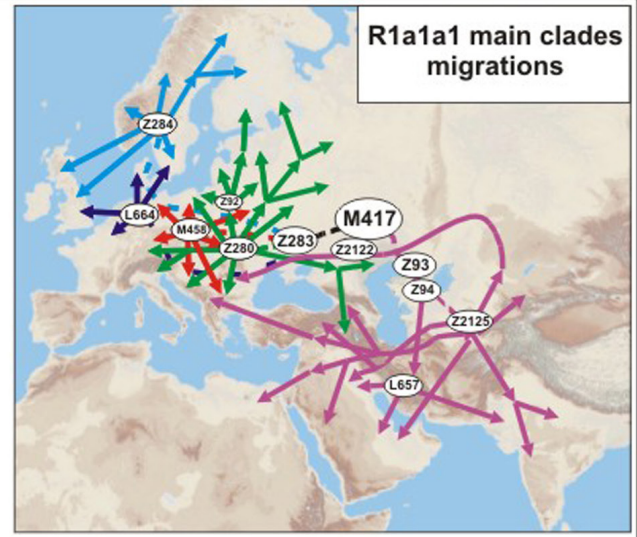
Updated: 10-July-2014 (L. Lubicz-Lapinski)
Haplogroups names with ISOGG.org standard
Age of Clades based on K. Nordtvedt system and BIG Y results
Http://www.familytreedna.com/public/R1a

R1a1 ~10.000 b.c. — M448 | M459 | M516 | SRY10831.2

R1a1a ~6.000 b.c. — M17 | M512 | M198 | M514

R1a1a1 ~4.800 b.c. — M417 | Pg07

R1a1a1b ~4.000 b.c. — CTS5508 | PF6162 =Z645; CTS9754 | PF6168 =Z647; F3044 =Z651



Western European Ancestry

R1a1a1a — CTS4385

L664 ~3.000 b.c. — S3478 | S2856 — S2861 | S3477

Germanic

European Ancestry

Z283 R1a1a1b1 ~3.500 b.c.

Z282

Y2395 — Western & Northern Europe

Z284 ~2.500 b.c. — S5301 — YP555 | CTS4027 | S6842 | YP355

Norsemen

L448 — CTS4179 — YP386 | YP276 | S6355 — L176 | F1493

Scots

Z287 | Z288 — CTS8277 | CTS8401 | YP401

M458 | PF7521 ~2.500 b.c. — L260 | CTS 11962 ~ 500 b.c. — YP254 | L1029 | YP509

West Slavs *Slavs*

Central Europe

Central & Eastern Europe — Z280 ~3.000 b.c.

S24902 — Western Europe

CTS1211 | CTS3607 | Y34

YP340 ~1.500 b.c. — P278 | YP380

L784

~2.000 b.c. CTS3402 | Y32

Y33 — CTS8816 — L1280 | Y1394 | S18681

Y2613

YP237 — YP234 | YP419 — YP295 — YP578 | L365 | L366 | YP335

Balts

Z92 | CTS456 — Z685 | YP270 — Y4459 | YP569

EurAsian Ancestry

R1a1a1b2 ~3.500 b.c. — Z93 | Z2479

~3.200 b.c. Z94 | L342

Y40

Z2124 ~3.000 b.c.

Indo-Aryans Tatars Arabs

L657 ~2.500 b.c.

S23592 — S23201 | YP348

Z2122 ~2.000 b.c. — F1345 | F2997 — CTS3412 | CTS6 | F2935

Levites

Y57

Z2125 — Z2123 — Y47 | Y934 — Y520 | Y874

Bashkirs

Y937 — YP450

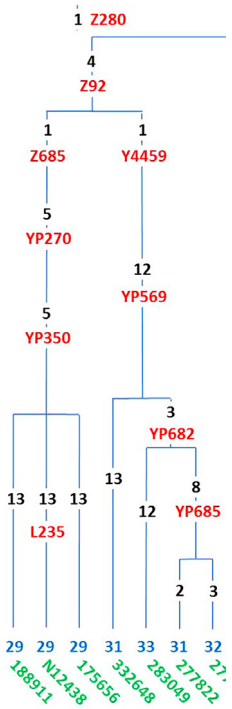
Indians

YP413 — Y6 | Y9 — Y7

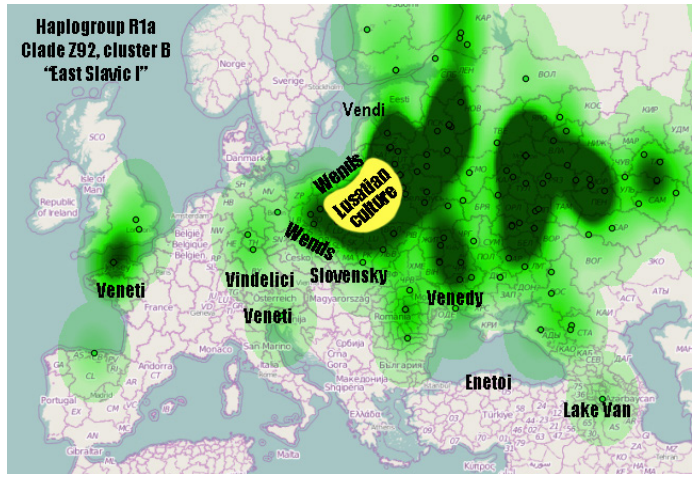
Karachays

Indians Arabs

North-Western Europe | Northern Europe | Central Europe | Central & Eastern Europe | Central & Eastern Europe | Eastern Europe | Europe & Asia | Eastern European Steppes | Eastern Europe & Central Asia | Central & Western Asia



Tree of Z92 clades



Spread of Z92, a clade of the R1a haplogroup, and topographic correspondence with following Venetic settlements.

A clade – from Ancient Greek κλάδος (*kládos*, 'branch') – is a group of organisms that consists of a common single ancestor and all its lineal descendants. In Europe there are nearly forty branches of haplogroup R1a, among which there is the branch R1a-Z92 (*North Euro-Asian* branch), which covers the areas of the original Venetic settlements in Western Ukraine and the Baltic area, thereby highlighting both the oldest (Ponto-Baltic) and the more recent (Balto-Adriatic) amber routes. Interesting is the presence – albeit vague – of haplogroup R1a-Z92 in Brittany, which may confirm the hypothesis put forward by Jadranka Gvozdanović regarding a linguistic homogeneity between the Baltic Veneti and the Veneti from Brittany. Another unexpected localisation of Z92 is in the Lake Van area, in Armenia. Z92 is a subgroup of Z280, which originated 4900-5400 years ago in the East European Plain and was found in the Halberstadt sample, which is believed to represent the Lusatian culture in North-Eastern Germany.

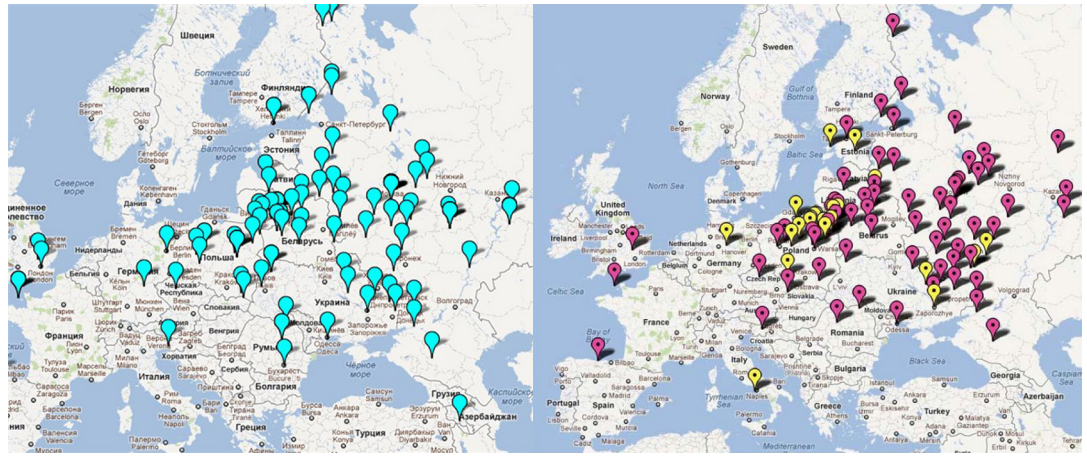
The concentration of R1a is rather weak both in Italy and in Veneto, but what is clear is a delimited area of presence whose geographical centre is Friuli, a region between the North-East of Italy and Slovenia. Throughout Europe a spread similar to that of R1a-Z92 is also valid for other branches of R1a – e.g., for R1a-M458-L260 (West Slavic branch), R1a-YP578 and R1a-YP419 (Balto-Carpathian branch) – but they do not generally include the Atlantic area. Since the Lusatian civilisation is peculiar of Proto-Venetic stock, the problem lies in finding a correlation between subgroups of R1a-Z92 – and eventually other subgroups of R1a – with the Lusatian civilisation within "its temporal limit", namely 1300-500 BC. Actually, R1a-M458-L260 (West Slavic branch) and R1a-YP578 (Balto-Carpathian branch) date back to around 1000 BC, but their distribution maps seem to correspond with less Venetic areas than those of Z92.

The *North Euro-Asian* (NEA) branch is therefore characterised by a single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) which is called Z92 and has two main sub-branches:

1) the most ancient sub-branch (NEA-1) has many haplotypes – that is, combinations of variations – which deviate from Z280 by 9 mutations and thus places its temporary collocation between 3600 ± 400 ybp, the equivalent of approximately 2000 - 1200 BC

2) the most recent sub-branch (NEA-2) has 12 mutations from basic haplotype Z280 and 13 mutations from NEA-1. The timeline covers the period of 2350 ± 300 ybp, which corresponds to 650 - 50 BC. Present-day bearers of both NEA branches are mainly the north-eastern Poles, the Russians, the Byelorussians and the Lithuanians.

It is very interesting to notice that both branches are contemporary to the Lusatian civilization: the most ancient is contemporary to the beginning of the new culture in 1300 BC and the most recent with its final period till 500 BC.



The general map on the left shows the pro-ancestors, that is the most ancients, of branch Z92 (in light blue). On the right, Rozhanskii and Klyosov distinguish two groups in order to highlight the most distant in time pro-ancestors of the "ancient" branch Z92 NEA-1 (in yellow) and the most distant in time pro-ancestors of the "recent" branch Z92 NEA-2 (in red).

From the maps above it is possible to notice that the ancient branch (in yellow) topographically had its central core in the Lusatian civilisation area, while the recent branch – in centrifugal migratory movement – reached both the South Adriatic and the West Atlantic. Meaningful is the empty space between the Baltic diffusion area and the Atlantic area, which can only be explained with the distribution of local Venetic tribes. Technically, those 4% bearers of Z92 in England – if we consider just their origin – are supposed to be descendants of East Slavic populations, maybe some 2-3 thousand years ago. This does not mean that Z92 is the only marker for the Lusatian-Venetic civilisation: both the Lusatian civilisation and the Veneti were characterised by a mosaic, whose features were the different sub-branches, not only of the haplogroup R1a but also of the R1b, G and I2. In this mosaic of heterogeneous components, Anthony Murphy Barrett identified the clade R1b-L513 (2500 - 500 BC) as belonging to the Atlantic Venetic tribes mainly in the coastal communities of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Instead the MacDonald Clan,

Anatole Klyosov

whose Scottish ancestor was "King of the Islands" (Hebrides) and "Lord of Argyll and Kintrye", might belong to haplogroup R1a. Lord Somerlet of Argyll was, in fact, a bearer of sub-branch L176, which may be attributed to the Scots.

Anatole Klyosov is a scientist who was born in the amber region of Kaliningrad (Russian enclave) and has lived in the USA since 1990. He is known worldwide for his studies on physical chemistry, enzyme catalysis, biomedical sciences, industrial biochemistry and computerised mathematical-statistical applications on studies regarding DNA genealogy. In Russia he was awarded one of the most prestigious national prises for Science and Technology. Klyosov is famous in Russia because of his controversial theory about the origin of the Slavic populations. With reference to his genetic research, he has hypothesised that the ancient inhabitants of Arkaim, in the Southern Urals, had started the Andronovo culture (2000 BC) and that approximately in 1600 BC they had left the area in order to migrate to Northern India under the name of Arians.

In February 2015 Klyosov published a detailed survey on the Veneti. It is a preliminary study – a sort of brainstorming – in which he offers the scientific community new paths towards further studies. The Veneti and the Wends are introduced as a group of tribes, who many consider as the ancient Slavs who settled or migrated throughout vast territories which go from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Atlantic coast, as well as to Asia Minor. Attention is therefore focused on the problem of the hypothetical homeland of the Veneti and on where the descendants of ancient Veneti are today. One of the first historical sources based on ancient authors is that of Marcus Junianius Justinus (2nd-3rd cent.), whose work was well-known during the Late Roman Age: "Namque Tuscorum populi, qui oram Inferi maris possident, a Lydia venerunt, et Venetos". Considering that Lydia (Central-Western Anatolia) was founded in the 12th century BC, this sentence suggests that both the Etruscans and the Veneti came from there. Well before Junianius Justinus and Livy, Zenodotus of Ephesus (325 - 260 BC) – director of the Library of Alexandria – wrote that the Veneti, having lost their leader during the Trojan War, crossed Europe through the Thrace and after long-lasting wandering reached the Upper Adriatic. Klyosov mentions the Veneti from Brittany and highlights the fact that a lot of them survived after the defeat, as they reappeared in volume VII of the *De bello Gallico* in the Battle of Alesia (52 BC).

The haplogroup R1a, the most common among the Slavic populations, was chosen by Klyosov as the starting point for his research, even if the current percentage present in Veneto is very modest and thus a major source of doubt (however, from around 7% in Veneto and 13% in the Friuli, this percentage can reach a higher peak amongst the population on the coast of Venice's Gulf). In general, there are about twenty branches of R1a that cover the Baltic and Carpathian areas, while its subclade Z280 comes from the East European Plain. If the Veneti and the Wends belonged to the Eastern-European family, then their modern descendants should – at least in part – belong to the haplogroup R1a: this is merely a series of hypotheses which could contain mistakes at every link of the chain.

Nevertheless there are some clues of validity.

Almost all of the few Italian haplogroups of type R1a, such as subclade Z92, come from the northern regions of the Slavic area. The connection between the Baltic and the Upper Adriatic area does, therefore, not seem to be impossible. The date of this migration, or rather the period during which these common ancestors lived, must still be established. Klyosov dates "the age" of subclade Z92 back to approximately 4600 ± 400 years ago. In turn the two branches of subclades Z685 and Y4459 originate from Z92 and are dated back respectively to 3800 ± 350 and 3200 ± 360 years ago. The latter corresponds to the period of the Trojan War and to the development of the Lusatian civilisation in the Baltic. Therefore these two branches may have created the Venetic contingent. There are other haplogroups which can correspond with the Trzciniec and Lusatian cultures, for example the Baltic-Carpathian Branch CTS3402, whose eldest branches YP237 and Y33 are dated back to approximately 3640 years ago. It cannot be excluded that there might have been other ancient R1a subclades of the Lusatian civilisation that do not correspond to the main R1a sub-groups of modern Europeans, because now extinct or on the verge of disappearing.

Owing to the entangled amount of branches and subclades present inside the Baltic-Carpathian area, Anatole Klyosov reaches the conclusion that at the moment it is not possible to establish which type of subclade or branch of haplogroup R1a was the "Venetic" one. The purpose of the article – according to the author – is informative, didactic and scientific. The accurate technical details can be the basis for further research, obviously for whom is interested in this challenge.

In the Friuli Venezia Giulia region the clinic-epidemiological research on Val di Resia's population, a little community at the border between Friuli and Slovenia, involved a team of experts among which there were cardiologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, nutritionists and geneticists. The geneticist Paolo Gasparini created a genetic map, which shows that the people from Val di Resia share on average approximately 79% of the same genomic pool and that the "genetic drift", which is connected with their long isolation, made them different not only from their neighbours but also from the other Europeans.

Nowadays, in 2017, there is hope that the fascinating incentives of this book can restore the interest in prehistory which was set aside during the 20th century after having reached its peak in the 19th century. Because of economic crisis, Italy is unable to face the problem of establishing an efficient team work: university positions in anthropology are lacking, as are anthropologists specialised in the Veneti – with the exception of Gianluigi Secco (who is however specialised in the Veneti's folk traditions). The economic crisis is having bad consequences on Venetic archaeology, which is halted for the lack of money. Consequently, its only hope can be the interest of foreign archaeologists or of lovers outside universities. Regarding all these genetic descriptions about the Veneti, the judgment can be "true" or "likely" or "unlikely", and nobody in the world can assure which one is right. Unless we have excavated DNA from proven Veneti, we are doomed to fantasise. We need not just bones but "certified" bones, approved by qualified archaeologists (they call it "DNA along with their passports") together with big financial supports and with a strong motivation for a serious study.

HOLY AROMAS

All components of Creation are living. Plants are vital as they receive and transmit communication: our scientific-technological civilisation has lost both contact with and instinctive comprehension of plants. It was different for people living in ancient times. The language which is used by plants to communicate with insects and humans is made up of aromas. A list of aromas used in Cyprus comes from one of the most ancient perfume factories of the Mediterranean (2000 BC). They were oregano, cinnamon, parsley, chamomile, anise and others – such as bay tree, rosemary, bitter almond and myrtle – which also entered into the ancient Venetic tradition.

In some Anatolian myths we find almonds and myrtle. The almond tree is present in the myth of Attis, when the nymph of the River Sangarios becomes pregnant by collecting one of its fruits. Myrtle is instead connected with the myth of Pelops, who built a statue full of myrtle in honour of Aphrodite and thanks to the charioteer Myrtilus, son of the Amazon Myrto, won the horse race in order to marry Hippodamia.

In the *Bacchae* by Euripides it is written: "They all crown each other with wreaths of ivy, oak and blossoming smilax". The Greek myth attributes the birth of saffron to the passionate love – obstructed by the gods – between the young Crocus, a mortal, and the nymph Smilax. The mortal lover was transformed into a plant of saffron and the nymph into a plant of sarsaparille, the Smilax aspera. The sarsaparille takes its name from the Spanish word *zarzaparrilla*, which is made up of *zarza* 'shrub' and *parrilla* ('grapevine, vine-trellis'). In the brush the Smilax climbs the trees or creates impenetrable masses. It has a woody and glabrous stem, leaves with short and strong spines, white flowers and red berries. In Italy smilax is common almost all over the peninsula but rarer in the North, where it is present only in isolated zones (Trieste, Grado, Chioggia and Cervia).

The Veneti from Brittany had a culture that developed independently if compared to that of their neighbours. From 120 BC they minted their own currency. The coin on the right shows an elegant racing horse and a charioteer with a branch with smilax-like leaves in his hand. If it is really the flowering ivy of Smilax aspera, then we must conclude that it was a holy plant for the Veneti. The same plant can, in fact, also be found in the frame around the discus of Montebelluna, where the bird at the centre has the heart-shaped leaves of smilax in its beak and eats its berries.

ANCIENT FITNESS

Fitness is not only the absence of disease, but also a good sensation of intense physical well-being. From the 1st century BC on the little hill of Montirone in Abano (province of Padua) there was a small temple which was dedicated to the health god Aponus, that is Apollo, and had an adjacent laboratory for the production of votive statuettes. For centuries Montirone was the centre of the thermal area thanks to the spring on its top.

The poet Claudius Claudianus described this holy lake situated in the middle of a marshy land, where boiling and sulphurous water springs flow freely, as follows:

Like a bubbly sea, there is in the middle a light blue lake with a very large perimeter, which occupies an enormous space.

Into the holy waters of this beautiful and magical environment, the ancient Veneti used to give offers and to ritually dive (8th century BC). From 49 BC – when Padua became a *municipium* – the high society of Padua built a rich and articulate thermal structure which imitated the Roman style. Boulevards, gardens, fountains, libraries, salons and rich patrician villas were built next to the thermal pools.

The salty-bromine-iodine thermal waters of Abano are radioactive and reach a temperature of 84° C. In the archaeological area (Montegrotto Terme) there are remains of a thermal monumental complex where the thermal pools are made up of three contiguous pools with a little theatre and *nymphaeum* next to it. In the middle of the area – connected with the thermal pools – there are remains of the complex hydraulic system for water supply and removal. The network of channels extends for over 200 m and is connected with the principal collector and the two water wheels for water lifting and handling.

Generally, the typical formal development of Roman thermal baths was a sequence of environments with an indoor pool of cold water, namely the room of *frigidarium*, followed toward south by an outdoor *calidarium*, with hot water containers or steam baths. Between *frigidarium* and *calidarium* there was a room at a pleasant temperature, the *tepidarium*, in which an artificial cooling was created. In this way, it was possible to have the equivalent of a Finnish sauna, that is, a quick passage from hot to cold and vice versa. The *natationes* were, instead, the pools used for swimming. Beyond the rich thermal baths for the patricians and high society, there were also poorer thermal baths for the plebs.

Thermal customs included the habit of throwing aromas and spiced wines into the water in order to increase the beneficial effects of the baths. Pumice stone and beech ash, or even a paste of equisetum ash, clay and olive oil were used for bathing.

Pan flute, situla from Vače (Central Slovenia)

There is evidence that among the Veneti both the lyre and Pan flute (syrinx) were used in an ideal combination between stringed and horned instruments to create music. The analogy between the seven reeds of the Pan flute and the seven strings of lyre is evident. In the classical period, the lyre was associated with moderation, while the flute was linked with Dionysian ecstasy; therefore these two antithetical elements found harmony among the Veneti.

Lyres were formed by a U-shaped body, closed by a crossbar which stretched the strings. The instrument was invented by the god Hermes, who stretched seven strings of sheep-intestine inside a turtle shell: the shell was the image of intermediate life between Heaven and Earth, the stretched skin was the symbol of sacrifice, and the two horns on which the strings were assembled represented the celestial Taurus. Hermes gave the lyre to Apollo who in turn gave it to his son Orpheus. The latter was so famous for his musical skills that at the sound of his lyre the ferocious beasts became tame and even the god of the Underworld, Hades, implored him to continue playing.

Francesco Zugno (Venice, 1709 - 1787)

The poet Ovid tells the myth of the wind instrument and celebrates Pan's furious love for the Naiad-nymph Syrinx. At the sight of the hairy, horned and hoofed-foot Pan, the beautiful nymph ran away and – fearing she would be captured – implored the help of the Naiads, the nymphs who presided over fresh water and had healing and prophetic powers (the prototype of the future Agane fairies of North-East Italy). The Naiads agreed to transform her into marshy reed, just in time before Pan could grasp her. Desperate, the god threw himself into the reeds and while he was tearing them from water, he heard the sound of wind which was crossing them. Pan used the reeds to make the musical instrument of the "syrinx" and kept on playing thinking about his beloved one.

The Pan flute, made of reeds of different and decreasing length, dates back to 2500 BC and is the most famous instrument of antiquity. Surprisingly, this instrument was already known and widespread in the Americas before Columbus. In general the number of tubes is odd – 5, 7, 9 and 13 reeds – and from the iconography of the situlas it seems that the 5-reed flute was preferred among the Veneti.

Arundo donax (Giant reed)

Cicuta virosa (Hemlock)

Classical authors allow us to determine which material was used to make the Pan flute. Apuleius called the swamp reed "mother of sweet music" or gentle reed (*Arundo donax*). In the *Bucolics*, Virgil explains the Pan flute as formed by seven unequal reeds of water hemlock. Some people doubt that the ancients would put their lips to a very poisonous plant like *Cicuta virosa*, famous for its use in the death sentence of Socrates, and thus prefer to think that they referred to the use of Sambucus.

The scholar and artist Walter Maioli discovered, instead, that the poisonous latex transported by the sap drains out when the trunks and branches of hemlock dry, so that its handling is not dangerous. Hemlock sticks are sufficiently resistant to last over time and are particularly light and delicate, as all *Umbrelliferae* are. This lightness gives the reeds a powerful, full but pleasant sonority, so that hemlock has a better performance than swamp reed. Experimental archaeology has confirmed what Virgil had written: Walter Maioli built a Pan flute with hemlock stems and used it for over ten years in his successful concerts.

Later on the Pan flute was built with more resistant materials, such as *terracotta*, wood, ivory, stone alabaster and metal. Archetypal musical scales originate from the structure of the first musical instruments and are the common heritage of all ancient populations. They are "not tempered" music scales which can be divided into two categories: the scales with 4 or 5 notes – which follow semitones – and the scales with fourth, fifth and eighth intervals. The different ways of phrasing are determined by the expressive possibilities of the instrument. The rhythms and the base sound modules are still used in folk traditions, where the drone – that is, the note which is continuously sounded throughout – represents the typical "mode" of ancient music. Surprisingly, the Pan flute is still used in the folk music of Bergamo (Northern Italy) and by a musical band from Bottanuco, thereby witnessing the importance of the folkloristic tradition by local people. From the point of view of the performing technique, the group

Situla from Certosa (Etruscan-Venetic culture)

of Sifoi plays with the typical style of the area of Bergamo, whose feature is the "pointed" sound, namely a sound obtained through a single blow of tongue on reed. This is the real way of playing and even the most difficult.

Even in the Greco-Roman world the lyre and syrinx were frequently depicted together. In the situla of Certosa, belonging to the Etruscan-Venetic environment, the Pan flute is associated with a variation of the lyre called *cithara*, which does not have the band of tight skin typical of the lyre, but a wooden sounding box instead. The combination between stringed and horned instruments, namely the lyre and the Pan flute, appears in Pompeii and is represented in the well-known Dionysian ritual of the Villa of the Mysteries. On the basis of archaeological research the musical band Synaulia has reproduced ancient Roman and Etruscan music at a high qualitative level, such as in the sound tracks of movies. It seems that the Ancients were aware that particular frequencies are able to provoke in humans precise and objective effects from the neuro-psychological point of view and therefore to influence the emergence of particular emotions and mental states up to a condition of "enchantment". The effect is not limited to humans. The Etruscans described their way of capturing stags and wild boars, which involved the use of music alongside nets and dogs.

Apollo with the chelys-lyre, Greek vase, 460 BC

Apollo's favourite instrument was the lyre, but flute music was also present in the celebrations dedicated to the god. In the indivisible group that he formed with the Muses, Apollo played the cithara and the Muses were the melodious singers. With his cithara Apollo "the pure", the god born from light, expressed the harmony of the seven planets, as Pliny, Macrobius and Censorinus reported.

Even in myth there is the lyre-flute association. We know that Pan wanted to challenge Apollo's musical ability with his flute, even if he knew that he could not equal the god's excellent art of the lyre. The King of Phrygia, Midas, intervened as arbiter of the situation and, being ignorant from a musical point of view, he wanted to award the victory to Pan. Apollo therefore punished Midas by transforming his ears into those of a donkey. The king tried to cover his long ears with a hat but, while he was having his hair cut, his barber saw them. King Midas forced him to keep silent or else be killed. The terrible secret tormented the barber's soul, so in order to free himself from the weight, he dug a hole in the ground and shouted the terrible secret inside it: "King Midas has donkey ears!". When the hole was covered, reeds grew out of it and when the wind moved the reeds, as if by magic, they repeated the words of the barber's confession, so everybody knew about Midas' horrible ears.

Arc di san Marc is the name of the rainbow in the Friulian language (North-East of Italy) and indicates a holy bridge that connects two distant points of the horizon. During his evangelizing journey the Apostle St. Mark, according to the oral tradition, departed from Alexandria in Egypt and reached Aquileia near the wood still called the San Marco pinewood (48 BC). On the top of a fossil hill, surrounded by this pinewood, there is in Belvedere a small church with the statue of St. Mark holding the Gospel, which was written here. The symbol of St. Mark is the winged lion because his Gospel starts with the voice of St. John the Baptist raising like the roar of a lion in the desert.

Even if there is no historical evidence, according to Federico Orso this arrival is confirmed by a series of clues. During St. Mark's period there was extensive cultural and commercial exchange between the two cities, so much so that a Jewish-Christian tradition, which was strongly connected with Jewish law, had arrived from Alexandria to Aquileia. At the end of the 4th century the apostolic derivation and the use of Alexandria's administrative procedures were, thus, already evident in the Church of Aquileia. For centuries the Jewish influences continued to be part of the liturgy of the Church of Aquileia: for example, a specific version of *The Apostles Creed* and the observation of Saturday as a festivity continued up to the 17th century. Only in Friulian hagiography there are traces of the cult of *sante Sabide*, a female "St. Saturday" to whom nearly twenty local churches are dedicated.

Other influences of St. Mark on Christian cultural and musical practises in the area of Aquileia seem to confirm the legend. Among these there is the use of resurgence water for therapeutic-symbolic purposes and the celebration of Pentecost with music and dance, in particular the night vigil, where dance brought the participants to ecstasy thanks to a rhythm which we still find in the popular dance *la furlana*. The persistence of sabbatical-Pentecostal night rituals would – according to Federico Orso – be proven by the trials of the Holy Inquisition, which offer evidence that on the night of Pentecost men and women went in procession singing "schiarazzula marazzula" in two choirs. This is the incipit of the Friulian dance *scjaraçule maraçule*, where we can identify the two neo-Greek terms *charax kai marathon*, namely 'reed' and 'fennel', which are the symbols of the ritual fight between Good and Evil. Good is symbolised by fennel, the weapon of the Friulian shamans, known as *benandanti*.

In the Christian world, the concept of apocatastasis (ἀποκατάστασις) – the universal salvation – is expressed only in one single verse of the Bible in the Acts of Apostles:

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore any existing creature, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

In the early centuries of Christianity the main supporter of apocatastasis was Origen of Alexandria. According to the Greek theologian and philosopher, at the end of time there will be universal redemption and all the creatures, including Satan and death, will be re-integrated in the original fullness. Consequently, infernal punishments have a purifying and not definite purpose, because salvation cannot be fulfilled if even *one single creature* is

The mosaic of Aquileia's Basilica shows Jonah thrown into the sea by fishermen and eaten by a marine monster

missing. St. Mark may have been influenced by this idea from Alexandria. This would explain his disappointment and disagreement when he abandoned the current of thought of St. Paul – who stated that the Saviour died only for baptised people – and his decision to approach the opposing thought of St. Peter, who believed that Christ died for everybody. Mark was born into a rich family from the most aristocratic part of Jerusalem and, knowing many languages very well, was able to communicate successfully with everyone in the cosmopolitan Aquileia. In 553 apocatastasis was condemned as heresy during the 5th Ecumenical Council in Constantinople.

At the centre of the magnificent mosaic floor of the Basilica of Aquileia, alongside interlaced illustrations and mythical animals, there is the story of Jonah and the whale, the only representation from the Bible. Why was this theme so important? In the biblical story Jonah is thrown into the sea and a marine monster eats him. After remaining in its stomach for three days and three nights, he prays God intensely and the fish vomits him onto the beach. Christianity has often incorporated local cults too deeply rooted in folk beliefs to be removed. In this case it seems that the story of Jonah hints to the myth of the Solar Boat, with its mythic voyage to the world of darkness and back.

Among the mysteries of Venice one of the most interesting is the relic of St. Mark. The problem of the authenticity of the relics is always tainted with doubts and uncertainties about their origin, because the market of holy relics – mostly controlled by the merchants of the Middle Ages – was very big. The historical context in which the stealing of St. Mark's body from Alexandria took place was characterised by the crisis of the Venetian Church, whose seat was in Grado. In this period the Venetian diplomacy was able to maintain a balance between the two powers of the time, the Byzantine and the Carolingian powers. Louis the Pious, the fourth legitimate child of Charlemagne, used the religious reform as a means to better control his large empire. The dynasty of the Franks supported the Church of Aquileia, whose rise was able to obscure the Church of Venice. During the Synod of 827, in Mantua, the Patriarch of Aquileia said that the Franks had reunified the ancient *X Regio Venetia et Histria* (divided between the

Byzantines and the Longobards) and that Aquileia should therefore become once again the sole reference point of the region. He asked for the elimination of the Patriarchate of Grado, the reference point for Venice and the lagoon islands. The Synod granted the request and Grado was downgraded in law, even if it continued to exist in practise. The acquisition of the Evangelist's relic was therefore functional for the vindication and elevation of the Church of Venice in terms of prestige.

In 828 two Venetian merchants, Rustico di Torcello and Buono di Malamocco, went to Alexandria to look for the Church of St. Mark. In that period the Alexandrian clergy was worried about the possible destruction of the church and the dispersion of the relics because of the Islamic governors of the city. The merchants thus convinced the guardians of the church to give them the body so that they could take it away. They hid the Saint's bones in a case full of quarters of pork and cauliflowers. When the Islamic officials controlled the case, they said: "*Kinzir!*" ('pork') – and closed the case.

Between 823 and 925 the relic of St. Mark, or more probably a part of it, arrived at Lake Constance (the ancient *Lacus Venetus*). The Venetian family Candiano gave the relic to the Abbey of Reichenau, which was located on Reichenau Island. Still today the inhabitants of the island, which is now in Germany on the border with Switzerland, show an extraordinary participation to their religious tradition and the devotion for the relic has survived in the heartfelt procession of 25 April.

The procession of St. Mark's relic on 25th April at Lake Constance

During the uprising of 976 against Candiano IV, the Doge's Palace in Venice was set on fire by the rioters and the Doge, who was forced to come out, was massacred. The fire soon extended to St. Mark's Basilica, but – at *Lacus Venetus* – the presage of the Candianos had already saved the relic from fire, future loss and degradation due to the salty-humid climate.

Instead in Venice, in June 1094, while the building of the third basilica was underway, the body of the patron could not be found: all memories regarding the place where the bones had been hidden were lost because only a few people knew the place for fear of theft. Among the fasts and prayers of the believers, crying of despair, on 25 June a sweet aroma flooded into the Basilica and the Saint revealed the location of his relics by extending an arm from the pillar that had sustained the fire of the old basilica. Among the astonished witnesses, there was Doge Vitale Falier and bishop Domenico Contarini, together with a jubilant crowd who had met at the basilica. For over three months the body of the Saint *totus integer* (preserved totally intact) was exposed for veneration.

A further inspection of the body of the Saint was carried out in 1811. As Leonardo Manin declared, the case was damp because of the lagoon humidity – so the bones, the skull and teeth were placed in a new larch case.

The Christian cult of relics was a continuation of the cult of the Greek heroes. The bones of Pelops in Olympia and the remains of Tantalus in Argos were venerated in a clay urn. The celebrations of the heroes were officiated annually with hymns and public speeches and the graves of heroes were also places of healing and divination. Greek mausoleums were often tall, virtually towers, but the tomb chamber was subterranean and Caesar descended into the tomb chamber of Alexander's mausoleum in Alexandria.

There is a mystery regarding the substitution of St. Mark's remains with those of Alexander of Macedon. Alexander died in Babylon and was embalmed; after a period of time he was buried in the Egyptian city which he had founded and bore his name. The grave of the Evangelist St. Mark was also located not far from that of Alexander the Great. Yet, while there are no doubts about the conservation of the mummified body of Alexander, the destiny of the Evangelist's body is uncertain. Even the story of the Saint's martyrdom is controversial. A few hours before death an angel appeared to him in his cell and comforted him with the words: *Pax tibi Marce evangelista meus*. In the original version, the body of St. Mark was actually burnt and not snatched from the flames. However, none of the ancient fathers of the Church reported the martyrdom until the 4th century, not even Jerome – the father and doctor of the Latin Church. The misunderstanding arose when the "mummy" of St. Mark appeared in Alexandria and that of Alexander simultaneously disappeared. According to some sources, Alexander's body was still visible in 391 AD, soon before the outlaw of paganism. Then there was no other trace of it, while St. Mark's relics appeared at the end of the 4th century. This mystery and the description of the *totus integer* (mummified) body encouraged British scholar Andrew Chugg to think that the stolen bones were those of the great leader. During the restoration works of St. Mark's Basilica, there was a strange coincidence even though connected with the veneration for Alexander during the Middle Ages: the architect Forlati discovered a fragment of a funeral monument with an eight-pointed star similar to the emblem of Alexander's dynasty (in the tombs of Vergina, in Macedonia, the Macedonian star was engraved on the cover of a gold case containing the burnt bones of Phillip II). Moreover, on the north side of the Basilica of Venice there is a 12th-century Byzantine low relief which depicts Alexander "who flies in the sky" on a winged griffin-drawn cart – the symbol of supreme power which was first Macedonian, then Byzantine and finally Venetian.

Radiocarbon dating may at least exclude Medieval forgeries or distinguish between the dating of Alexander the Great (4th century BC) and that of St. Mark (1st century). Strontium ratio tests on the tooth enamel help to find out where the individual spent his childhood. Either Alexander's tibia or fibula were struck by an arrow in Sogdiana and all sources, except Arrian, say that another arrow stuck his sternum in the Indian city of Mallian. No proof is thus possible without a new inspection of the remains: if it is Alexander, there should be bone damage in the chest area and to a lower leg. Moreover the Vatican has allowed the *Reggimento Lagunari "Serenissima"* to host and protect a relic of St. Mark. After having been subjected to Carbon-14 dating, the relic contained in a silver case has been confirmed by the Vatican's historical-scientific committee to have belonged to a male subject who lived in St. Mark's period.

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TO EOS

But soon as early appeared Dawn, the rosy-fingered, then gathered the folk about the pyre of the glorious Hector. (Iliad, XXIV.776)

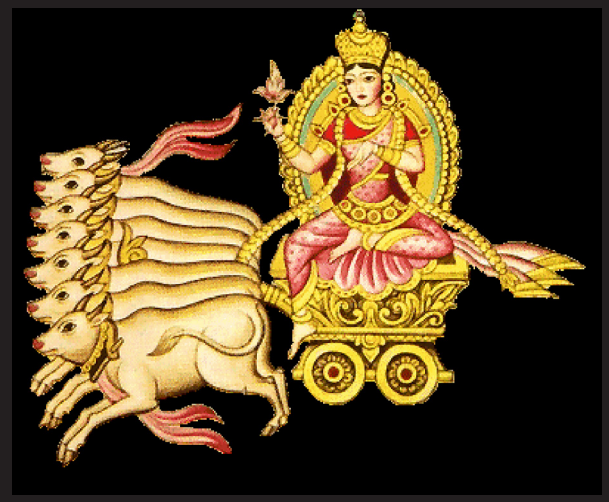
The personification of Dawn, called Eos, is one of the earliest goddesses in Greek mythology. Her being mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* and linked to the cult of the Titans testify to her antiquity. With her marvellous saffron-coloured robe, this Titaness rises each morning from her home at the edge of the Oceanus. She is, in fact, one of the daughters of the Titans Hyperion and Theia and the sister of Helios (the Sun) and Selene (the Moon). Her figure is related to the ancient Veneti cult because she was the mother of Phaethon, the alleged son of the Sun god Helios who fell into the Po River with his father's chariot. The image of the winged woman was very popular in Etruscan and in Italic mythology too where it was mainly linked to Eos' abduction by Cephalus. She was called *Aurora* or *Mater Matuta* by the Latins and *Thesan* by the Etruscans (who used to depict images on amber of the winged woman in love with the divine youth). In the Orphic hymns, which presumably date back to the oral tradition of the 8th-6th centuries BC, Phaethon Protogenus is believed to be an emanation of Eros, the primigenial and glittering god who was born from the germless egg laid by the black-winged Night.

In the large Indo-European area, Eos is matched by an important Vedic goddess called Ushas. This graceful and fascinating figure is the favourite deity in Vedic poetry: in the *Rig Veda*, for instance, she is mentioned more than 300 times and is present in 20 among the most beautiful hymns of the entire collection, which comprises 1028 hymns.

In the *Rig Veda*, Ushas is invoked as follows:

Like the sea waves, the radiant Dawns have risen up for glory in their white splendour. Decking thyself, thou makest bare thy bosom shining in majesty, thou Goddess Morning.

From the Proto-Indo-European root **Ausós*, Ushas is cognate to Eos. This root is also present in the Lithuanian *Auszra* or, in the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons of Northumbria, in the form of *Ēostre* and, likewise, in the Old Germanic as *Ostara* – better known as equinox spring festival, which was later converted into the Christian Easter of the Nordic countries. The Vedic deity Indra, who is called *apavarjan* or "He who gave being to the Sun and Morning", is believed to be a cognate to Apollo. Even though the solar deity Helios was a Titan, he



Ushas, the Vedic deity of the Dawn

is often called *Phoebus*, but only during a more recent era (5th century BC) is identified as Apollo – as to express the following "Olympic" religion focused on the supreme ruler of Gods, Zeus. In Sicily Helios had seven herds of oxen and seven flocks of sheep, each with 50 animals which could not grow, die or multiply. The meaning of this story was linked to their being symbols for the 50 weeks of seven days and seven nights which made up the Greek year. Apollo had a herd of oxen too, which Hermes stole from him. In the *Rig Veda*, Indra – the highest god – is often associated with an ox: the cows and the Ushas were caught and imprisoned in a dark cave by the demon Vala until Indra set them free. Going back to Greece and to Hercules' 12th labour on the island of Erytheia, that is the capture of Geryon's cattle, the labour takes on all its meaning in the cosmogonic context which links the Vedas to Greek mythology through the division of time and its control from the lurking dark forces. All this clarifies the importance of Geryon's oracle in Abano, the Venetic location which takes its name from Apollo.

According to Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the hymns dedicated to the Ushas could only have been inspired by the awesomeness and length of the Arctic dawns. There are Vedic hymns of 1000 verses which have to be completely sung between the first light and the rise of the Sun, a task which is possible only under a very long dawn. Among the Vedas there is the assumption of a prolonged dawn even due to its division into three parts: the dawn next to rise, the dawn rising and the fully manifested dawn. This typically Arctic phaenomenon, i.e. the persisting of the dawn for many days before the sun rises, is clearly described in the Vedas with the phrase: "Many dawns have not completely accomplished their expression yet". Probably we could simply consider the Baltic area when speaking of the Arctic, since no archaeological evidence left by any advanced civilization has been found in the Arctic, even though there was a favourable climate before the last Ice Age.

In the *Rig-Veda* the Underworld is the land of water and must therefore be crossed by the Sun on a boat. Riding a cart while he is rising from the sea – in the belief that the Underworld is full of water – Helios has the same unbreakable connection with water as does Indra. This disorientates some academics because it may seem baffling that a solar deity like Indra could be "the one who releases the waters" at once. However, this is not so surprising if we consider the European symbols and meanings which led to the basic tradition of the myth called the *Solar Boat*, which carries the sun at dawn. Helios' chariot does not tow a proper cart with wheels, but a golden cup which emerges from the sea, that is, another version of the *Solar Boat*. *This golden cup was given to Heracles by Helios, because of his choice not to threaten him with a bow; Heracles travelled inside this cup to Erythia - in the far West - but when he was on high seas the Titan Oceanus appeared, making the cup sway dangerously, to test him. Heracles threatened Oceanus to shoot him with an arrow and the Titan was so frightened that he decided to let him go.* The structure of this myth is similar to that of Phaethon, in which the boy asks his father Helios for permission to drive the sun chariot as proof of his fatherhood, but he is unable to control the vehicle. In the myth his wish is accomplished but his inability to drive the chariot is fatal to him. In late iconography the cup was replaced with a chariot pulled by four winged horses. We could be looking at proof of initiation in which the hero was supposed to get on the

The Chariot of Aurora. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (Venice 1696 - 1770 Madrid)

The solar goddess Saulė and the lunar god Menulis

Solar Boat to mime the path of the sun and to accomplish the work of creation.

In Latvian cult the golden boat of the sun is mourned by the daughters of the sky. For the Latvians, Saulė is the Sun goddess. This solar deity is believed to be beautiful and to live in a castle of the Far East. Each morning she drives across the sky on her shining chariot made of gold and fire, pulled by two matching white horses called *Asviniai*, the divine twins of the celestial deity Dievas (in the Vedas the sun at sunset must be saved by the homonymous twins *Ashvins*). At dusk the chariot comes down into the Baltic Sea and Saulė transforms it into a golden boat which takes her across the sea. By night, she has to travel in the Underworld while the boat is guided by the goddess Perkunele who washes the tired and dusty Saulė in the sea. She will bid Saulė goodbye only the following morning when she is rested and shining and ready for another journey through the sky. As the daylight shortens during autumn, Saulė gets weaker in her fight against the dark forces of the Underworld, so the people used to make rituals and spells to help her. Celebrations to remember her liberation from the tower were held during the winter solstice until the 15th century.

Saulė is a beloved and famous deity that is devoutly remembered both by the Latvians and the Lithuanians even today, even though she is very ancient. Women pass on songs in which this goddess cries amber tears over her daughter who was seduced by her evil father. Saulė abandons her groom Menulis (the Moon) because of his incest with their daughter Ausrine, the dawn. For his crime he will be cut in half, like the moon is in its phases. Since these populations were Christianized last, they might have well passed down the very ancient symbol of the *Solar Boat*, which dates back to the Bronze Age. The very name Saulė means 'sun' and she is considered to be the queen of the sky and of the earth. This matriarch of the cosmos is the mother of some planets, such as the Morning Star (Venus) and Indraja (Jupiter). She is often represented as a golden-haired woman, dressed with golden silk, holding an amber spindle or the "cup of the light". Her garden is in the West and is full of apple trees whose fruits are made of gold, silver and diamonds. Traditionally Saulė is represented with a golden apple and is associated with fire wheels, horses or with the lime tree, as well as with white cows at dawn and with black cows at sunset.

There is a strong belief that the Sun is a dynamic and centrifugal symbol and can thus be easily associated with a male deity, as happens for the Greeks, the Latins and the Celts. Further north, however, it is not unusual to see the Sun embodied by a feminine deity. *Sunna* is the solar deity for the German tribes, which are not only the ancestors of present-day Germans but also of the Scandinavians, the French and the Anglo-Saxons. *Sunnu* is a Viking goddess and she is related with Saulė, related Indo-European goddess. The Finns have popular solar goddesses, like *Paivatar* and the Finno-Ugric *Akanidi*. Apparently the Siberian goddess *Kajae* influenced the Korean solar deity and the Japanese *Amaterasu*. In Iran the solar deity *Anahita* is often depicted while she is riding a lion (4th century BC), while in Colchis, Georgia, the cult of a Caucasian solar deity was spread between the 3rd millennium and the 6th century BC. Other very ancient evidence leads to the domain of the Hittites in Anatolia, where a goddess – whose name has been lost – was associated to the lion and dominated over all the lands of the Earth. From Anatolia, the Indo-European cult of the solar deity may have thus reached the Baltic through the Ponto-Baltic route.

The cult of the solar goddess was thus best attested and widespread in Northern Europe. Reitia *[Reìzxia]* was the goddess of the Veneti and could have come from the Nordic cults because of her association with the *Solar Boat* – whose symbol was held by this goddess in the form of a key or a bipartite sceptre. It could be argued that in the far western area (Ireland) the goddess Brigit had some features of the solar deity and in Gaelic the word 'sun' is feminine. Yet, this does not contradict what has been said about the Nordic area, if we assume that Brigit is another version of a common deity, which originated both Brigit and Reitia. As far as the *Venetia* region is concerned, archaeologists agree on the fact that the myth of the *Solar Boat* arrived from the North. Indeed, in bronze artefacts, the stylistic motif of the *Solar Boat* appeared for the first time in Central Europe during the Late Urnfield culture (11th century BC - first half of the 10th century BC). The Venetic goddess is associated both with the Solar boat and – in the bronze disc in Montebelluna – with the wolf as "tamed wolf". The presence here of the wolf can be better understood if we compare it with a solar myth from the North: *In the Edda, the Viking goddess Sunnu drives a chariot pulled by horses running as fast as they can in order to escape from her terrible pursuer, the wolf Skoll. When he gets too close to her, he causes the eclipse and at the end of time he will finally be able to reach her and devour her; the Sun will thus be swallowed during the Ragnarǫk, that is, the final battle between good and evil forces.*

In the celestial sphere of Uranian cult, by the Veneti was greatly worshipped Saturn, that is, the Kronos of the Titans' religion. The Titans were immortal creatures characterised by a colossal stature; the tip of the highest oak would barely brush against their hips and they could easily crush its trunk. In a cosmic conception where there was a sort of continuity between sky and water, Oceanus was considered to be the oldest among the Titans. They gave their names to many rivers, such as Eridanus (the Po River), Istro (the Danube) and Partenio (in Paphlagonia). Among the Titans' offspring there was the sweet Lētṓ (Latona in the light-blue peplos) and Hecates, the last surviving goddess of the Titans' progeny. The Hellenic Titânes (Τιτάνες) surely had many links with the ancient gods of the Anatolian tradition, the Karuileš Šiuneš. Little is known about the latters: the Hittite texts depict them as *old and wise divinities* who were relegated to the Underworld and not very present in mythical vicissitudes. Kumarbi, the supreme god of the Hurrians, was the counterpart of the "crooked-minded" Kronos, who had some features of a lunar deity, such as his sickle, a symbol of the crescent moon. Kronos evirated

Ouranus with a sickle, taking his place "in heaven" and letting his brothers fall into the darkness of Tartarus. This terrible mutilation resembles that of Attis, Cybele' s consort, and that of Menulis, Saulė's husband who was cut in half, like the moon and its phases. Kronos then married Rhea, the queen of the sky, who since the 4th century BC appeared in Greek iconography in a heavenly chariot pulled by two lions or, alternatively, riding a lion herself. In the Orphic Hymns, Rhea yoked the two lions – *the killers of oxen* – to the sacred chariot. The polarity emerges once again very strongly: the male part is symbolised by the moon and the ox, while the female part is symbolised by the sun and the lion. This was a key element in ancient times but grew quite unusual in later periods. In Greek pottery, *Okeanos* was painted with horns and this is why the lunar masculinity could have been present since the beginning of the Titan cult. Rhea, mother of the gods and of mankind, is probably the deity that most of all resembles and is close to the essence of the Venetic goddess Reitia. In Rhea's variant Cybele, the polarity between sun and moon is proven by the Phrygian cap of her consort, Attis. This kind of hat has the pointed shape of a horn, which represents the lunar masculinity that persists through the centuries in the emblem of the "ducal hat" worn by the Venetian doges.

At the root of our most ancient memories we can therefore assume the existence of a Proto-Indo-European myth in which a solar maiden, or lion-goddess, had two suitors: the ox-god of the moon (who will be evirated later on) and the twin-sons of the god of heaven. To make an example related to India, Savitr is the daughter of Surya, the god of the sun, and sometimes she is also described as the bride of the Ashvins. The Ashvins can be compared to the Ašvieniai, that is, the divine twins of the Baltic religion who were associated with Saulė. They can be compared to Castor and Pollux, – the two Dioskouroi, sons of Zeus – who were worshipped by the Veneti. It is thus necessary to acknowledge the importance of this cult and the great quantity of temples dedicated by the Veneti to the *Dioskouroi*, who were called *Alci* by the Germans and *Alcomno* in Este. Castor and Pollux were the brothers of Helen of Troy, the wife of Menelaus, whose name contained the stem **men* ('the moon'), while Helen's name contains the stem **hel*, that is 'light' – like Helios or like the *ēlektron* ('amber').

Durgā on the tiger and buffalo-headed Mahiṣāura

To testify this substantive uniformity between the Native European Faith and the beliefs of the Vedas there is Durga, a goddess who rides a lion while fighting against an ox-headed enemy. Her opponent is the embodiment of Mahiṣāura and belongs to the Asuras, divine beings who compete for power with the benevolent Devas. Among the fourteen Vedic Upaniṣads – written in Sanskrit from the 9th-8th centuries BC to the 4th cent. BC – the *Maha Narayana Upaniṣad* reads as follows: *May He, the Divine Fire that leads all, protect us by taking us across all the perils just as a captain takes the boat across the sea [...]. I take refuge in Here, the Goddess Durgā, who is fiery in lustre and radiant with ardency [...].*

Going back to Hesiod's *Theogony*, we find the first association between the dawn and a star: *And after Erigeneia (the Early-born) takes origin the star Eosphorus (Dawn-bringer), and the gleaming stars with which heaven is crowned.*

Since the final draft of the *Rig Veda* is estimated to be around 1000 BC and Hesiod's *Theogony* dates back to 700 BC, all these Dawn goddesses could have a common ancestor that dates back to before 1000 BC that is, simultaneously with the European Urnfield culture. In the context of the Native European Faith, Helios – the solar deity from the Titans' cult and the prototype of Apollo – has his correspondents too. These corresponding deities are the Vedic Indra, the Slavic Belbog (from a Czech and Polish toponym) and Belun (from the Russian tradition), but also Beleno – whose assimilation with Apollo is clearly proven in Aquileia (an Italian city located in the North-East). Helios and Beleno share in fact the stem **bhel*, that means 'to shine'. The eight-pointed star is widespread in Slavic popular culture and represents *Auseklis* / *Aušrinė* that is, a Lithuanian version of the Dawn which was associated with the planet Venus. *Auseklis* has a counterpart in Slovenia, embodied by the two wives of the Moon God *Myesyats*: the morning star and the evening star who work together with *Zora*, the goddess of the Dawn, to keep the winged dog *Simargl* chained to the Ursa Minor's constellation.

Irena Urankar

In 1947 the well-known Etruscologist Massimo Pallottino put forward a different perspective regarding the question on the origins of the Etruscans. He underlined that the methodological mistake lies in insisting on finding an answer to the question: "Where did the Etruscans come from?". We must, instead, shift the focus to the question: "How did this people develop?". We should not, that is, rely "on the simplistic concept of provenance, admitting their arrival from lands outside Italy, by sea from the East and by land from the West (and thereby move the problem geographically without solving it), or identify the Etruscans with the ancient native inhabitants of the Italic peninsula (which means moving the problem backwards in a chronological sense)". The only source of interpretation which is able to consistently explain the archaeological reality becomes then the concept of *ethnic formation* of the Etruscan population, that is, a "controllable historical reality, which coincides with the idea of nation that flourished in Etruria between the 9th and the 1st centuries BC., with its own language and traditions".

The concept of *ethnic formation*, as specifically expressed (and misunderstood by Italian archaeologists), does not correspond at all to the idea of autochthony "which means moving the problem backwards in a chronological sense". Pallottino did not find the way to circumvent the problem about the origins or to clarify the uncertainty around prehistorical migrations. His methodology is, instead, well-balanced and complex and enriches the hypothesis on the formation of the Etruscan nation with "elements that are oriental, continental and native, and which should be investigated, circumscribed, assessed and mutually compared". Pallottino's hypothesis, which has been repeatedly verified over time, has proven to be extremely fruitful for the understanding of cultural and historical phenomena and continues to grow thanks to new discoveries.

Thus, with the unanimous approval of archaeologists, the concept of *ethnic formation* was applied even for other Italic civilizations which were concomitant with the Etruscans. One may, however, wonder whether this method can be applied to the ancient Veneti as well, since they were a population of traders, dedicated to ongoing micro-migrations and to establishing identical colonies along the trade routes as guard and protection posts. In this case the simplistic and monolithic concept of mass migration is not applicable, nor is that of a "unitary reality or block up to its elusive prehistory". Although Pallottino's method is malleable until the contemplation of transalpine connections in the formation of the Venetic language, it is still a static and not very suitable approach to explain the dynamic character of the Veneti. Indeed, since 1984 when Pallottino's *A History of Early Italy* was published, the so-called "fake" problem of the Veneti's origins has been considered as closed and thus not in need of further debate. As a consequence, research on this topic – and scientific publications in Italy – has lagged behind for more than thirty years. In 1984 the Berlin Wall had not yet collapsed and none among the Eastern countries had joined the European Union. How, then, could the problem of the Veneti's origins be considered solved without having accessed the archaeological sources of the Eastern countries? It was still the time of the lack of communication between the Eastern bloc and the Western one; not to mention the language barriers, which have not yet been crossed even after the incorporation of Poland and the Baltic States into the European Union.

Can we conclude that the concept of *ethnic formation* has been a successful model at least for the Etruscans? Italian archaeologist Claudio De Palma disagrees with this perspective and states that: "The Eastern provenience of the Etruscans is an undeniable and unchallenged truth all over the world apart from Italy". Recently, genetic studies faintly support the idea of the Anatolian origin of the Etruscans, as the data from the mtDNA (from the haplogroup U7a2a) found by Alessandro Achilli and Francesca Brisighelli highlight the existence of a direct, and rather recent, genetic link between the modern Tuscans and the populations of the Middle East. Apparently this scenario agrees with some assertions made by classical sources, such as Herodotus:

In the reign of Atys son of Manes, there was great scarcity of food in all Lydia. At last their king divided the people into two groups, and made them draw lots, so that one group should remain and the other leave the country; he himself was to be the head of those who drew the lot to remain there, and his son, whose name was Tyrrhenus, of those who departed. Then the one group, having drawn the lot, left the country and came down to Smyrna and built ships, in which they loaded all the goods that could be transported aboard, and sailed away to seek a livelihood and a country; until at last, after sojourning with one people after another, they came to the land of Umbri where they founded cities and have lived ever since. They no longer called themselves Lydians but Tyrrhenians, after the name of the king's son who had led them there. (Herodotus, *Histories*)

While Herodotus insisted on the Etruscan's provenance from Anatolia, the Greek historian Dionysus of Halicarnassus believed them to be a population which was settled in Italy for a very long time. The ancient controversy now finds an echo among geneticists like David Caramelli, who disprove the Anatolian origin because the samples of Anatolian genes are 5,000 years old and so they are not related with the appearance of the Etruscan civilization during the 8th century BC. Within the field of paleo-genetics the application of Next-Generation Sequencing technologies have allowed scientists to retrieve genetic information from the DNA molecules of very ancient samples. This high resolution approach enables to distinguish endogenous molecules of mitochondrial DNA from the Etruscan samples, which are however quite degraded and have a very small quantity of useful genetic material (about 1-5 % of the total DNA).

Regardless of what the final outcome of these studies on the Etruscans will be, the dialectical concept put forward by Pallottino is most likely to be replaced by the international data obtained with the Haplogroup population genetics, a new approach that will revolutionise much of the archaeology of ancient Italian populations, including that of the Veneti. Some Italian archaeologists already deny that the Este culture derives from the Proto-Villanovian one, as they claim the Veneti were not acquainted with this culture which was made up of linguistically different ethnic groups. They thus contradict Pallottino's argument that the Este culture was born at the beginning of the Iron Age from the already well-established "Proto-Villanovian" culture. Granted that in the midst of

the confusion created by the variety of meanings assigned to the term "Proto-Villanovian" (often inappropriately classified) Pallottino distinguishes between the conventionally cultural expression and the chronological one, it is nevertheless true that he clearly states that the Este culture "was born" from the Proto-Villanovian culture, thereby using the term with the meaning of a precise derivation and parentage. Indeed, the designation "Proto-Villanovian culture" was introduced in 1937 to indicate a series of cultural aspects shared throughout the Italian territory, including Sicily, which date back to the end of the Bronze Age between the 12th and 10th cent. BC. It is, however, still uncertain whether "the Villanovians" ever existed, even if they are so often abusively referred to.

Which ethnic groups were there in the *Venetia* before the Veneti then? Terramare is an ancient archaeological complex in Northern Italy which dates back to the Bronze Age (from 1650 BC). The population of the Terramare settlements lived mainly in the area of Cremona and Mantua and then incorporated the area of Verona as well. Despite the name, the Terramare were not pile dwellings in the water but multi-layered archaeological sites which gave rise to fortified hills up to five metres high. These settlements were stops along the tin and amber trade routes which came down through the Alps and crossed the Val Camonica all the way to the Po estuary, thereby connecting the Adriatic with the Mycenaean civilization. Can the inhabitants of Terramare have been the locals referred to in the legend of Antenor? The 12th century BC marked an important change. In fact, around 1200 BC the Terramare culture faced a deep crisis which led to an irreversible collapse and to the abandonment of almost every settlement. Currently it is believed that their disappearance was determined by the conjunction of various causes – which include a crisis of the natural resources – but the dynamic is still not very clear. By the end of the 12th century BC, the Po Valley was almost uninhabited. Apart from a few exceptions in the Apennines, the Emilia region remained depopulated until the end of the 7th century BC, when it was colonised by the Etruscans. In the *Venetia* region there was a dramatic demographic collapse and only a few scattered sites, like Bovolone and Fondo Paviani, survived in the plain of Verona. Later on, the huge settlement of Frattesina was founded in the *Venetia* on the Po River and as the new core of the system it inherited the role of mediator with Central Europe for the amber trade and with the Mediterranean for the trade of exotic goods. Frattesina had many features in common with the Urnfield culture of Central Europe and, more specifically, with the groups of the "Danube Valley". Thus, when one cultural system collapsed, another flourished: the Terramare crisis resulted mostly in a "cultural replacement" rather than in a rebirth and evolution of local cultures (as claimed by Lorenzo Braccesi). It is, however, true that the Terramare people used to incinerate the dead and bury their ashes in urns like the Urnfield culture, rather than bury the bodies like the neighbouring Italic populations did. If the inhabitants of Terramare were the Euganei of the legend, then Frattesina was Antenor's real end point or, more precisely, the first occurrence of the Venetic population in the Adriatic area.

In Europe the year 1200 BC coincides with the growth of the Urnfield culture. Thus, even in the *Venetia* region, if we exclude the Proto-Villanovian and the Terramare culture, there are no other cultural antecedents to consider. Marija Gimbutas supports the

idea of a Proto-Italic colonization of Italy by some North-Alpine Urnfield groups from Austria and Bavaria and believes that groups coming from the "Middle Danube" penetrated into the *Venetia*. Unquestionably, evidence suggests that the Este culture belongs to the Urnfield culture because the Veneti burned the bodies of the dead in pyres and then gathered their ashes into urns which were buried in wide graveyards. To consider the Este culture as deriving from the Urnfield culture or, instead, to the Lusatian civilization is a trivial problem if we recognise the Lusatian civilization bearers as the natives, that is, as those to have been among the first to occupy the area between East Germany and Poland and to have spread their urnfields across half of Europe, creating different groups as a result of the mingling between their culture and the local substrates (such as the Italic variety called Veneti).

What about the Hallstatt culture? According to Bogusław Gediga, the map of the Hallstatt culture's spreading incorporates both the Silesian area of Poland (in accordance with excavations made in 2011) and the *Venetia* region. There are no objections to the significant influence of the Hallstatt culture on the formation of the ancient Venetic population, even if Hallstatt describes a cultural homogeneity whose ethnic matrix is uncertain and most probably heterogeneous. Consider it as one may, a discussion of this culture is, however, irrelevant for the problem about the Veneti's origins, as it came chronologically later. The Este culture began, in fact, from the 10th-9th centuries BC, while, according to the classical theory, the Hallstatt culture began from the 8th century BC. In any case, the domination of the Hallstatt aristocracy did not influence the religious cult of the Veneti since, unlike the Este culture, the Hallstatt culture preferred the burial of the dead.

The Hallstatt area according to B. Gediga

As aforesaid, after the publication of Pallottino's *A History of Early Italy*, Italian archaeologists considered the question of the Veneti's origins closed. Yet, the debate continued abroad. In 1990 Wojciech Nowakowski (from the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw) quoted two main opinions on the issue which dominated the literature on the ancient Veneti: 1) According to the first hypothesis, the Veneti were a Slavic population or, at least, one of the main ethnic substrates from which the Slavs originated at the beginning of the Early Middle Ages. To support this thesis, there is the report by Jordanès (6th century): *Venetharum natio quorum nomina licet nunc per varias familias et loca mutentur, principaliter tamen Sclavini ac Antes nominantur*. It is important to notice that among the *varias familias* of the Venetic nation, *Antes* corresponds to the Antae (or Antes, an ancient Ukrainian people). It is also notable that in the Lithuanian language *antis* means 'duck', from the Proto Indo-European term *ennet* / *aennet* – which could be the possible origin of the name of the city called Enete, the capital of Paphlagonia.

2) The second thesis, formulated ten years earlier, is that of the "ancient ethnic substrate" suggested by Gerard Labuda, a professor of History and Chancellor of the Poznań University in 1962. Labuda, who belonged to a Kashubian family (one of the few remaining Slavic populations of Pomerania together with the Slovincians), believed the Veneti to be an archaic European population which once occupied Central Europe and which, during the 1st centuries of our era, had been reduced to just a few scattered tribal groups: the Veneti of the Adriatic and those of Brittany, the Venèdi quoted by Ptolemy and the Venethi quoted by Tacitus.

In the Breton dialect we sometimes find the *vanishing of the L*, which is also present among the Poles and the Veneti from the Adriatic. The Jewish scholar Françoise Bader, from the "Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes" at the Sorbonne of Paris, wrote as we know:

After leaving the port of Enetè, the Veneti chose the great rivers of Europe as their migration routes. These rivers, which were already part of the amber trade routes before the Veneti's transition, well-suited the needs of these great traders and transport experts who used both mules and boats, a custom that made them great to Caesar's eyes. They thus traded amber from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic and tin once they arrived there.

Since this detailed account was made in 2002 (that is, before my book *La dea veneta* was published), it denies me any paternity over the thesis of the Venetic expansion through Paphlagonia, the Baltic Area and the *Venetia*. Basically, it represents a rehabilitation of the Antenor legend put forward by the historian Livy, because Homer's Paphlagonia appears to be the starting point of all these migrations. Françoise Bader retrieves the figure of Pelops (also known as Chromios) who is commonly believed to be the ancestor of the Achaeans. Grandfather of Agamemnon, who was king during the Trojan War, Pelops ascended the throne having received the sceptre from the god Hermes. Pisa, an ancient town in the Western Peloponnese, was the north-eastern starting point for Pelops' expansion through the Peloponnese, where he settled as a refugee coming from Asia Minor. Even the city of Olympia was in the area of Elis, along the banks of the Alfeios. Pelops overthrew Oenomaus, the King of Pisa, and dedicated a myrtle-wood statue to Aphrodite, since myrtle was considered sacred and the winners were crowned with it. From it comes also the name of the charioteer Myrtilus, who was corrupted by Pelops to help him win against Oenomaus. Does the myth of Pelops and Hippodamia hide an ancient matriarchal cult? The Oracle predicts Oenomaus' death after the marriage of his daughter Hippodamia, and her marriage to Pelops reminds us of the Indian Rākshasa, that is, the abduction of the girl while her relatives and parents are being killed.

Pelops and Hippodamia (Ιπποδαμος 'tamer of horses')

Françoise Bader describes the Veneti as "eager to conquer" and Pelops as the migrant coming from Asia Minor. From the accounts written by Apollonius of Rhodes and by Euphorion, Pelops "the Venetos" was the leader of the Veneti, while according to other authors he was the leader of the Phrygians or of the Lydians. Pelasgus, not Pelops, was the mythical ancestor of the Pelasgians, another migrant and nomadic population. According to Dionysus of Halicarnassus, the Pelasgians reached the estuary of the Po and settled in the area of Spina (to the south of Venice) presumably becoming the ancestors of the Etruscans of Spina. Isidore of Seville also tells us that the Pelasgians came to Italy from the Western Peloponnese (Pilos). The name Pelasgians was used by classical Greek writers to signify all pre-classical indigenes of Greece. Homer however disassociates the Veneti from the Pelasgians; indeed, while the Pelasgians migrated by sea, the Veneti chose the great rivers.

It is logical to assume that the Eneti from Paphlagonia provided Troy with both Baltic amber and their wild horses, which were also used for the Hittites' war chariots. It is told that Poseidon, the god of horses, gave Pelops a marvellous golden chariot with two tireless winged horses. Pelops' horses were the ones from Paphlagonia and maybe their far descendants were the *Venetia* racehorses. G. Devereux's works have, in fact, shown that the reputation of Venetic horses reached Greece thanks to the myth of Pelops, who was also the founder of the Olympic Games. Venetic horses were famous throughout Greece as the best thoroughbred horses of the Games and were considered an assurance of winning in the equestrian disciplines: for example, Leon was an athlete who triumphed in 440 BC thanks to his horses, which came from the *Venetia*.

Around 1200 BC the civilizations which had flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the Mycenaeans and Hittites, suffered a very serious and rapid crisis which led them almost simultaneously to their doom, threatening even the Egyptians. Some scholars have come to the conclusion that a terrible aridity, generated by a radical climate change in the region, must have triggered the crisis of the Late Bronze Age, which was probably followed by famines and invasions from the sea. However, the area involved in the migrations seems to have been even wider because around 1200 BC there was a massive movement southward of people in Eastern and Central Europe and along the Balkans. This earthquake of mass migrations was so huge that it completely changed the equilibrium of the Aegeus. The "domino effect" caused by the migrant populations which pressured the neighbouring people to move – which led to the fall and replacement of a plethora of cultures – probably had its epicentre in Lusatian area. It is, in fact, commonly known that it was precisely in that period that the Urnfield culture radiated from the border between Eastern Germany and Poland to most of Europe, having such an explosive effect. The scholars Nicholas Hammond and Eugene N. Borza assume that the Bryges (whose name reminds us of the goddess Brigit) were members of the Lusatian civilization who migrated to the Southern Balkans during the Late Bronze Age. Herodotus likewise refers to the migration of the Bryges to Anatolia, where this population was later known as the Phrygians.

THE URNFIELD CULTURE

From the Ponto-Baltic culture of Trzciniec originated in 1450 BC the Lusatian civilization, main core of the Urnfield culture. Starting from Poland, along the Amber Road and the Danube Basin, the Urnfield culture spread first to the Verona area and to Frattesina, and finally to the Este culture.

Daugava
1100 BC
cremation

Lusatia
1450 BC

Low Rhine
1000 BC

Trzciniec
1700 BC

Morbihan
800 BC

Rhine-Swiss
group

Danube basin
1600-1300 BC

Verona area
2nd half 14th c.

Frattesina
13th cent.

Etruria
9th cent.

Catalonia
1000 BC

Pala
17th- 13th cent.

Troy
layer
6th H

Milazzo
11th cent.

In turn, the Phrygians succeeded in bringing the Hittites' empire down and then settled in their territory in Central Anatolia. In the same way, the decline of the Mycenaeans occurred around 1200 BC (with the beginning of the Greek Dark Ages), apparently due to the assault of the so-called Sea Peoples. This mysterious confederation also attacked the Egyptians' fleet, forcing them into terrible defensive battles. Although the precise identity of the Sea Peoples is unknown, among the confederate tribes some suggest that there were some Anatolian populations: the Lukka – who dominated the sea –, the Tereš or Turša – who were probably connected with the Tyrrhenians and with the presumed Etruscan migration –, the Danuna, who can be identified with the Greek Danaois or with the Israelite tribe of Dan and the Wešeš – who came from the city of Troy. All these peoples were probably endangered by the invasion of the Phrygians and may have pushed the natives of the Anatolian continent to amass near the coast when they invaded the area. The draught then did the rest.

In 1200 BC the border settlements of the Lusatian civilization reached Frattesina in the *Venetia* (Polesine region) with the same impetus. To confirm this fact there are the conclusions of Jadranka Gvozdanović, an eminent linguist specialised in ancient migrations, who scrupulously analysed the hypothetical phonological system used by the Proto-Veneti in Eastern Europe and proved that it coincided with that of the Veneti living in the Northern Adriatic. Moreover, this phonological system seems similar to the Breton dialect known as Vannetais, which she believes to derive from Armorica Venetic. Since Venetic grammar appears to be typically Celtic, Gvozdanović boldly classifies the language of *Venetia* among the Celtic languages. This assumption, however, has its incongruities and does not solve the chronological issue: the first Venetic inscriptions date back to the pre-Celtic era (550 BC) and even archaeology confirms that the Veneti were a more ancient population than the Celts, since they had already been present in the territory of the *Venetia* from the 9th cent. BC. The new classification cannot exclude that the Veneti may have introduced some variants in the phonology of the Celtic language, but the problem on the origins of the Venetic language remains: which language did the Veneti speak before they met the Celts?

Moreover, the Veneti could have "bridged the gap" during the passage of some terms from Eastern Central Europe to Latin, such as in the sequence *mŭrt-v* (Slavic), *murtuvoi* (Venetic), and *mortuus* (Latin). Indeed, Lejeune has admitted the possibility that Venetic could have been a form of transition between Celtic and Italic. Some aspects of the linguistic predominance of Venetic have also been found in the Slovenian area: for example, the irradiation from Venetic of the phenomenon of lenition, that is to say, the weakening of a consonant which becomes soft from being hard. The Venetic language could occupy a mid-position in the rigid classification of the European languages between Centum (Central-Western Europe) and Satem (Eastern Europe). In fact, there are some examples from the Slavonic and Baltic languages which do not reflect the characteristics of a Satem language, but adopt their counterparts from the Centum language. To solve this mystery, Andersen assumes that many elements of the Centum language were adopted before the evolution to a Satem language: among the Centum languages, Celtic (or Venetic) seems the most probable source of this early influence on the evolution of Slavonic.

Whether Venetic belongs to the *Centum* family, or is mid-way between Centum and Satem, or should be classified as a Celtic language as Gvozdanović sustains, or whether it belongs to an archaic and autonomous branch as Krahe and Polomé sustain, is of secondary importance – a mere matter of classification necessary for communication among scholars. What is relevant here is, instead, that Gvozdanović's research provides evidence that the three groups of Veneti (the Atlantic, Baltic and Adriatic) spoke a similar language and may have thus also shared a similar culture.

That the origin of the ancient Veneti was not autochthonous was unanimously believed by classical authors like Pliny the Elder, Cato, Livy, Sophocles, Strabo, Scymnus, Herodotus, Virgil and Stephen of Bysantium. Many present-day foreign scholars, including Aleksandr Gilferding, Davorin Trstenjak, Paul Kretschmer, Francisco Villar, Ivan Tomasic, Andres Paabo, Stjepan Pantelic, Josef Paulik, Marija Gimbutas, and Zbigniew Gołąb, also hypothesize a specific migration for the origins of the Veneti, beyond the generic Indo-European migration. The truth is that even some famous Italian scholars have suggested that the Veneti came from abroad. Giulia Fogolari, director of the Este Museum and professor at the University of Padua, for instance, believed that the Veneti may have come through the Balkans, along the waterways of the Danube, Sava and Drava. This is the same route followed by the Istrians who, according to Justin (a Latin historian who lived during the 2nd century AD) came from Colchis in pursuit of the Argonauts. In 1992 Giovan Battista Pellegrini, an Italian linguist and philologist born in Cencenighe Agordino (Dolomites area), addressed the complex problem of the ethnic origin of those whom he called the "first Veneti", who were present in many European areas. He tried to answer the following question: *Were the Veneti, described by classical sources as inhabitants of distant areas of Europe, one and the same Indo-European population that split up and migrated to different regions? Or does this ethnonym have a generic meaning which does not at all explain their original common ancestry?*

Pellegrini did not succeed in finding a final answer to his doubt; nevertheless he listed two solutions: 1) for the first interpretation he quotes the "example" of the widespread Celtic diaspora, as this population also reached many distant territories during historical and proto-historical times. This unity of origin of all the various Veneti was the solution embraced by both Michel Lejeune and the well-known Indo-European scholar Paul Kretschmer. Paul Kretschmer tried to present an acute synthesis – which was based on history, archaeology and linguistics – where he associated the expansion of the Venetic population with the spread of urnfields in the Lusatian civilization. 2) In the second Pellegrini refers to Giacomo Devoto who admitted that the area in which the Veneti spread coincided with the area of the urnfields, but argued that the only thing the Veneti had in common among them was the root **wen* – to which he gave the meaning of *conquerors*. As such they may have been the protagonists of a late wave of Indo-Europeans who pressed to the borders the preceding Indo-Europeans called Arii or Arya (and Devoto considered this term as "more aristocratic and outdated"). The position held by this Italian linguist, who was born in Genoa in 1897, was that supported by Marinetti and the Italian School of Prosdocimi. Scientific evidence will not be obtained if we remain

Duck-billed Lusatian simpula, similar to those of the sanctuary of Lagole (Cadore)

Lusatian "antenna sword" similar to those of the Venetia, 800 BC

confined to a single discipline: Linguistics "alone"can only give indications. A definitive answer can only be found by incorporating combined data from various disciplines, namely history, linguistics, mythology, medicine, genetics, archaeology and anthropology.

Archaeology itself is still an infertile discipline and remains a mere classification of potsherds and pieces of metal if it is not integrated cleverly within the broad vision which can be provided only by anthropology. What emerges if we revisit the artefacts with this new holistic approach? Swords with a spiral hilt, spiral armillas and duck-beak simpulas (dippers) are some stylistic elements which prove the analogies between the Northern Adriatic and the Lusatian civilization (the name Lusatia itself – which in the Lusatian language meant 'swamp' – indicates the Veneti's favourite environment). During the ceremony of the libation, the water contained in the dippers was poured on things to purify them. Simpulas were ritual bowls used to drink, and Lusatian simpulas had a duck-beak shaped handle, just like those preserved in the sanctuary of Lagole, in Cadore. The swords with the spiral hilt are also called "antenna swords", since their two symmetric spirals come from the pommel of the sword. Spiral armillas were bracelets with a double spiral which were worn around the mid-arm, under the deltoid muscle. The two spirals symbolised evolution (first spiral) and involution (second spiral), that is, the fate shared by everything – from the personal history of a single person to the history of peoples, from every little manifestation of nature to the cosmic cycles – since everything is subjected to this law which cannot be avoided. This very ancient symbol is related to the Vedic god of fire Agni "with the spiral horns" and is also evoked by the ram horns of Apollo Carneus. The word *kàrnos* means 'ram' and, among the pre-Doric populations of the Peloponnese, the Carneia was a celebration made by shepherds and farmers to please Carneus. In the etiological myth the sacrificial use of the ram recalls the killing of Carneus the soothsayer and the consequent atonement by the descendants of Heracles. The double spiral symbol is also present in the two symmetric swastikas, clockwise and counter-clockwise, used in the Vedic cult. The swastika is one of the most used symbols in Baltic art and is called "the fire crux" in Latvia. Finally, among the Veneti the existence of the fire cult is also supported by material artefacts: some types of Venetic andirons have pictures of stylised spirals and numerous ram-headed andirons have been found in Este.

FELICE VINCI IS RIGHT

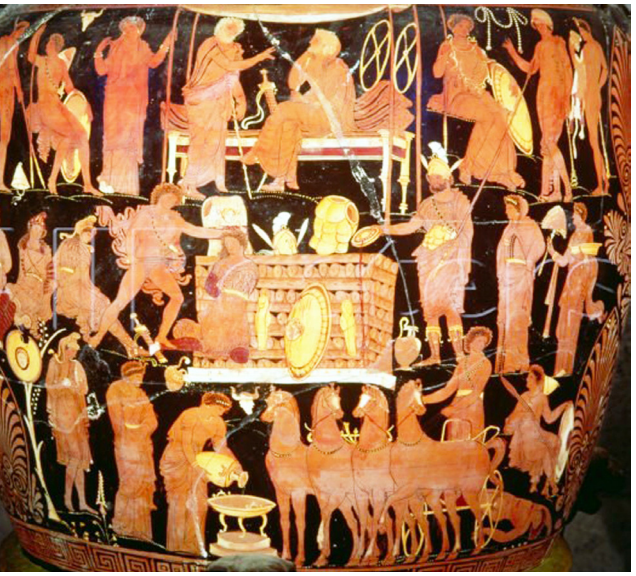
According to Felice Vinci, Homer's poems were set in the Baltic. He bases his hypothesis on the incongruence between the geography described by Homer and the conformation of the Aegean Sea, on the astronomical phenomenon of the longer days typical of Northern Europe, on the tides and the always dull and overcast sea. Against his thesis his opponents quote the known episodes of winter snowfalls over Aegean Troy, the use of heavy garments in the "summer" verily to protect the warriors from the cutting blades, and the lack of continuity of Homeric-like place names from ancient times to present day – e. g., Troy and Toija, in Finland. The alliance between the Hittites and Troas (Wilusa/Wilion/Ilion) was very old; it seems that the Trojans trained wild horses for the Hittite army and the character names of Troy (Taruisa) in Hittite documents have circumstantial and phonetically compatible corresponding names such as Sarpedon and *Sharpadduni*, Atreus and *Attarrisiya*, Paris and *Pari-zitis*. Unburied human remains indicate that around 1180 BC a fire destroyed level VIIa of Anatolian Troy, along with a large quantity of catapult bullets, while the surrounding cities had been abandoned shortly before as the result of an invasion. The next Troy (VIIb) experienced a rapid decline.

If we acknowledge that the *Iliad* is a inhomogeneous poem, a collage of elements coming from both the Baltic and the Mediterranean, we can understand why no one will ever be able to confirm its place of origin starting from the details: there will always be several points in favour and several points against the hypothesis that Homer's poem was set in the Baltic.

There is, however, an essential and embarrassing dissonance that clearly separates the historical Mycenaeans from Homer's poem and its explanation is a daunting task for archaeologists: *But in the morning rouse thou the folk, Agamemnon – king of tribes –, to bring wood and to make ready all that it beseemeth a dead man to have, when so he goeth beneath the murky darkness, to the end that unwearied fire may burn him quickly from sight, and the host betake it to its tasks.* Homer, *Iliad* XXIII vv. 50-51.

Cremation is the funeral rite that prevails in the *Iliad*. In Homer's poems, and especially in the *Iliad*, there are descriptions of grand funeral ceremonies where the deceased is elegantly dressed and laid on a pyre; grave goods are arranged around the body, offerings (even sacrificial) are made and lamenting songs are sung; funeral games and impressive banquets are organised to better pay homage to the fallen hero. On Patroclus' pyre Achilles burns two of his dogs, four horses and twelve young Trojan prisoners. The epic narrative should not be taken literally, but the nobles' weapons, dogs and horses were really placed on their funeral pyres. Patroclus' and Hector's funeral pyres at the end of the poem, are not the only examples of this kind of ceremony. In the *Iliad*, at least six cremation rites are mentioned (including XXIII 108-259, VII 77-86, XVIII 346-353, XXIV 787) and references of incinerations can also be found in the *Odyssey* (XI 31, XXIV 44 - 46).

The entombment of the ashes in stone burial mounds is the only form of ritual that is quoted by Homer. Towards the end of the Urnfield period, some dead people were cremated in the same place of burial, then covered by a "tumulus", according to the same use



Patroclus' funeral, ca. 330 BC.

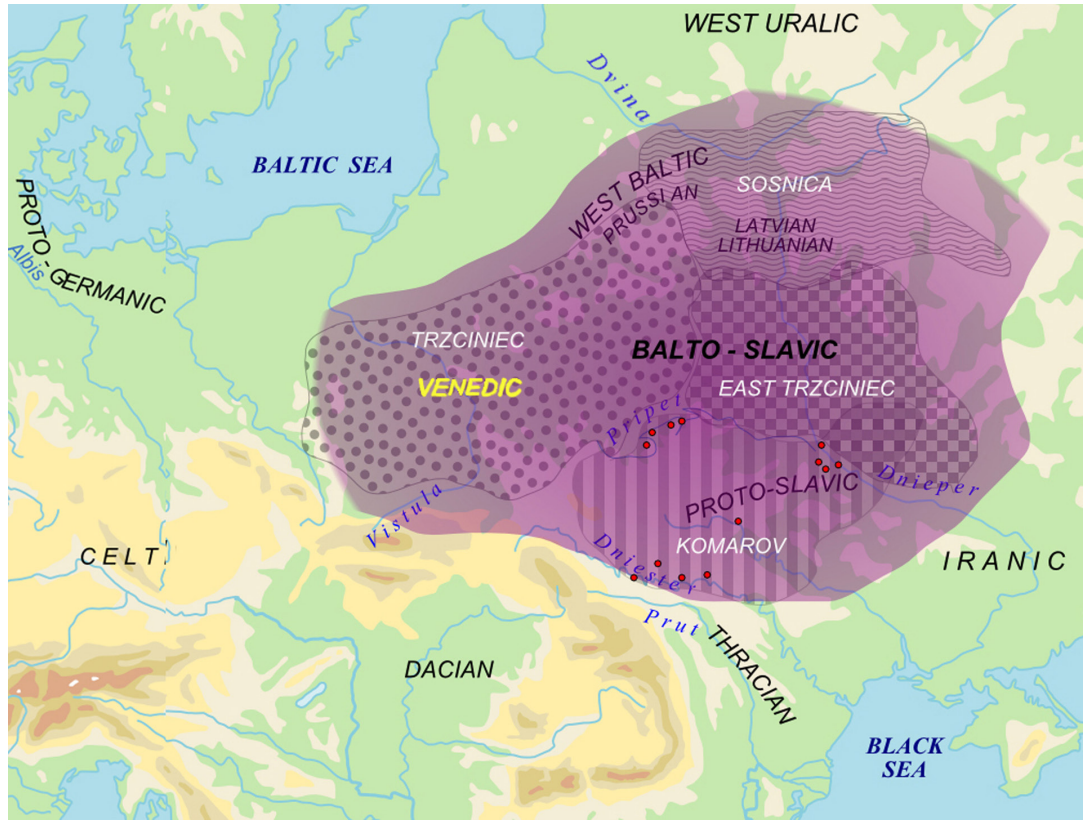
that is shown in the *Iliad* for Patroclus' burial. In the Lusatian civilization the "royal" tomb of Seddin, in Brandenburg (Germany), is covered by a wide earth barrow and contains some objects imported from the Mediterranean area. In Bavaria, the biggest urnfield cemetery of Baden-Württemberg is located in Dautmergen and consists of thirty graves. The dead were placed on the pyres, adorned with their personal jewels which still today show the signs of the fire. Whereas the majority of urnfields were abandoned at the end of the Bronze Age, only those in the Low Rhein (bordering on Baden-Wurttemberg to the east) continued to be used in the Early Iron Age. In the tumulus that was recently uncovered in Dautmergen, a 28 meters in diameter circular ditch marks the boundary of a big wooden room; the stakes placed within or near the ditch gave the same chronological dating of the wood which the room is made of, that is, ca. 670 BC. This reminds us of the passage in the *Iliad* which refers to Patroclus' grave:

They marked off the circle where the barrow should be, made a foundation for it about the pyre, and forthwith heaped up the earth. (Il. XXIII)

In the Mycenaeans' world, wide necropolises, all characterised by the exclusive use of inhumation, are known to be located in various Greek regions (Nafplio in Argolis, Volimidia in Messenia, Epidaurus Limera in Laconia and Palaiokastro in Arcadia; then the vast necropolises of Mycenae, Tiryns, Dendra, Prosymna, Berbati, Aidona, Thebe and Tanagra) and also islands (for example, Ialysos in Rhodes). It is a well-known fact that Ridgeway ascribed the introduction of the cremation rite to the conquerors coming from the north, the Achaeans. It is evidently wrong to think that the Achaeans and the Mycenaeans were the same people. Since later – during the Iron Age – cremation was a frequent practice, critics tend to believe that the description of the cremations in the *Iliad* comes from those late times. A perusal of Homer, however, contradicts this conclusion: the poet accurately narrates that iron was not used to create swords and spears at the time of the war of Troy. Granted the possibility of a late addition to the poem, the contamination however is never complete: usually, there are some sporadic and occasional elements left, both direct and indirect. Yet, in the *Iliad*, there is not a single trace of inhumation. The Mycenaean world and the *Iliad* are two non-communicating worlds: the former was committed exclusively to inhumation, the latter to cremation.

Curiously, according to Felice Vinci, there are toponyms that attest the presence of the Veneti in Finland: the *Vantaa* River flows into the Gulf of Finland near Vanhankaupunginselkä, that is about 200 km from Toija, where there are numerous prehistoric tumuli.

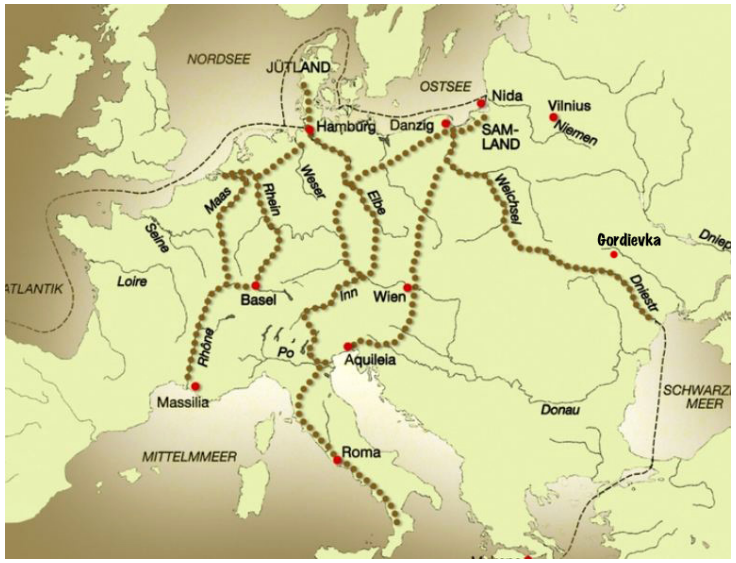
THE PONTO-BALTIC ISTHMUS



The Ponto-Baltic way was active at the beginning of the Bronze Age (first half of the 2nd millennium BC) and coincided with the development of the Trzciniec culture. First hypothesised by Kośko, this Crimean-Jutland route went from the Baltic seacoasts to the Black Sea, through the Vistula valleys and along the Ukrainian Bug River and the Boh River. As I have already argued in *La dea veneta*, the Trzciniec culture spawned the Lusatian civilization. This important passage was decisive in placing the birth of the latter within the broader and more heterogeneous world known as the Urnfield culture.

The "Central European Group" includes the Únětice culture and the following Tumulus culture. Moreover, if – as Gimbutas argues – it is true that between 1800 and 750 BC this Group too evolved into the Urnfield culture (since at a certain point these populations adopted the custom of incineration), this evolution must also have been "externally" influenced by the Trzciniec culture, the strong original nucleus of the new social and religious transformation. In the Upper Adriatic, the first Veneti arriving from the north may have found, among others, the bearers of the Tumulus culture (the mythical Euganei perhaps). Indeed, according to Gimbutas, this inhumation practicing culture reached the Northern Adriatic coasts. The Trzciniec-Lusatians can thus be considered as the bearers of a new revolutionary religion of incineration, to which both the Únětice and Tumulus populations converted, as well as some tribes of the complex and multifaceted Celtic world. This explains both the great spread of the Urnfield culture (across half of

Europe) and its heterogeneity. In it, the proto-Venetic element remains bounded to and identifiable in the Trzciniec culture, which controlled the Ponto-Baltic route from the Vistula to Ukraine with amber merchants. Their descendants are still traceable in the Venedy tribe located in Ukraine on the Western Bug, that was the former area of the Lusatian civilization in Volhynia. If the Lusatian civilization opened a descent passage to the south, it is plausible that the contacts with Anatolia continued in the following centuries in both directions, especially when commercial relations developed. From 1400 to 1200 BC the Lusatian civilization kept the commercial relations with the Ponto-Baltic way alive through the Bug River and with the mediation of Vysotsko culture. Later on, with the mediation of the Gordievka culture (Vinnytsya region), it continued to communicate directly with the Black Sea through the Bilozerka culture (1100-800 BC) of the Cimmerians. Indeed, the archaeological finds from the Gordievka tombs – i.e., the unusual abundance of the finds in the necropolis, the uniqueness of the ornamental composition and the presence of a large number of exogenous objects belonging to the neighbouring populations – suggest a highly developed commercial interaction. Roughly 1,500 beads, all of Baltic coast amber, were found; they presumably came from the trade along the Vistula route, the Bug River and the Southern Bug. Recent records about the Ukrainian Kurgan of Gordievka signal that different types of amber beads, like Tiryns and Allumiere, were present in the region. Pieces of necklaces containing the Tiryns and Allumiere types have been found in a very vast area that stretches from Switzerland to Ukraine, with the highest concentration in Greece and the Adriatic regions.



The main amber trade routes

To sum up, the Veneti were the populations which were more closely related to the Lusatian aspect, which they preserved more tenaciously than the other many subgroups integrated in the area of the Urnfield culture. These Venetic populations, which from a commercial point of view were scattered all across Europe, remained interconnected over long distances. Gvozdanović writes that the trade along the amber route was based on continuous contacts between the Central European Veneti and their Adriatic counterparts. Indeed, their strategy to keep the junctions of interregional trade as solid as possible is clearly visible and the Upper Adriatic was surely a crucial crossroads at the time, as the example of Frattesina confirms. Infrared spectroscopic analyses on the Frattesina

Gordievka woman's amber and gold jewelry. Gordievka site, near the Bug River route, shows the importance of the Ponto-Baltic Amber Road in Ukraine already between the 14th and 10th centuries BC.

ambers revealed that they contain succinite, a kind of variety extracted along the Baltic coasts. In Italy the Fondo Paviani (Legnago), close to that of Frattesina, shows in-process amber fragments of the Late Bronze Age and Frattesina itself was a manufacturing centre. According to the Harding hypothesis (1984), in the Late Mycenaean period – which extended until the 12th century BC – the Adriatic area was crucial in the amber trade. Moreover, the late-Mycenaean ceramic fragments recovered in this area are very few but of great interest, and they are clearly distinguishable from the local productions for the use of purified clays.

The major waterways coincided with the main trade routes of the time. There are "non-Slavic" hydronyms especially in the northern region of the Lower Vistula, which are presumably of Venetic origin. In the Vistula basin, the river names which have the root **dn* are numerous: Dunaj are called seven watercourses; then there is Dunajec, Biala Dunajcowa, Stare Dunajczysko, Dunajka, as well as the Dunajki Marsh, and the Dunaj and Dunajek lakes. In the Dnieper River basin, which also has the root **dn*, there are four tributaries called Dunaec, two called Dunajčik, one Dunajka and one Suxy Dunaec. It cannot be excluded that the root **dn* originated in Anatolia and, more precisely, in the Palaic language spoken by the Pala people, where *hapna-* means river. In the *Venetia* there are no rivers with this root, but there are some in the Atlantic: in Brittany there is the Don River (Vilaine affluent) and in Wales there are three rivers called Don. In Wales there is also the Dwfrdonwy river (made up of *dwfr*, a Middle Welsh word which means 'water', and of *donwy*); equally the Welsh name for the Danube is Afon Donwy, that is the Donwy River; the word Donwy enter in another river too: the Trydonwy, in English Roden. In Northern Ireland there is the Dun River and in Donegal the Dungloe River and Dunlewey Lake, that is the *Loch Dhún Lúiche*. There is a Don River in Eastern Scotland (in Aberdeenshire), recorded

by Ptolemy as "Devona" and meaning 'goddess', an indication that the river was once sacred to a goddess. Lastly, Dôn is the name of a Welsh goddess equivalent to the Irish Danu and Christianized in the Welsh patron saint of the lovers, that is Donwen, worshiped like St. Valentine.

Hydronyms seem to be among the most conservative words. Maps show a diffusion axis of the root **dn*, which goes from Ukraine to Poland and to the Atlantic exactly along the regions once inhabited by Veneti sailors. That amber reached the Atlantic is proven by the discovery of Bronze Age amber in Brittany at Hermitage (in Côtes-d'Armor), in Cornwall at Dartmoor (Devon), in Wiltshire at Upton Lovell and in Wessex at Boscombe Down. The Wessex culture, a Veneti's Contact Zone, seems to have had long-distance trade relations with continental Europe, importing amber from the Baltic and channelling it – together with tin – towards the routes connected to the Mycenaeans.

Anatolia was another important commercial crossroads, connected to the ancient interurban connections of the Middle East which continued in the direction of Asia and India. Moreover, at the beginning of the Bronze Age, bone was traded from the Black Sea to Central Europe and the importance given to this trading good at that time is perhaps indirectly foregrounded in the bone found in the myth of Pelops, king of the Veneti in Anatolia. Maybe one day it will be possible to reconstruct the route which from the north of Anatolia (where the Pala people were established) reached the Baltic. The Palaic language became extinct around 13th century BC since the region was conquered by the Kaska barbarians – an invasion which may be the reason of the exodus of the Pala people. According to Hüseyn Kaytan there is a link between the ancient Palaic language and the Kirmanjki or Zaza, the Indo-European language still spoken in Turkey in the Kurd area of Dersim. In 1937 the atrocities of the Turkish government against the rebellion of local Kurds ended with an ethnocide of an estimated 13,000 people.

In the 17th century BC the Pala territory is mentioned as a separate unit. The Palaic language – together with Lydian, Lycian and Carian – is an Indo-European language belonging to the subgroup of the Anatolian branch, recorded in tablets engraved in cuneiforms. The misunderstanding of Gimbutas and her followers is to have considered this region as a model of a "non-Indo-European" religion and society. Instead, Anatolia had an Indo-European linguistic base. Moreover, as Colin Renfrew's theories seem to suggest, it could even have been the gravitational centre out of which the Indo-Europeans propagated throughout Europe following the spread of farming. The Anatolian hypothesis suggested by Colin Renfrew in 1987 put forward the theory of a peaceful Indo-European propagation from Asia Minor into Europe from around 7000 BC through the advance of farming in Anatolia. The lack of archaeological evidence which unequivocally points out a break in social structures related to a violent event, like a violent invasion, seems to prove his theory. There is, however, as Luca Luigi Cavalli-Sforza suggests, the possibility to reconcile partly the theories of both Gimbutas and Renfrew. According to Cavalli-Sforza, in fact, the Indo-Europeans result from the union between local European populations and Neolithic Mediterranean populations, who came from Anatolia and brought agriculture to Southern Russia (8000-7000 BC).

Some Pomeranian populations, who had settled in the 4th-1st centuries BC along the Ponto-Baltic route in the Polish region between the Vistula and the Oder and who had adopted the practice of cremation (the Pomeranian-Klyoshova culture), migrated southward and settled in North-Western Ukraine in the current region of Rivne, at the centre of Volhynia. Then, between the 2nd-1st centuries BC, they probably contributed to the genesis of the Zarubyntsi culture, whose development is assigned by some scholars to the Veneti quoted by Tacitus. Consequently the area occupied by the local Veneti (the Venedy) in the first quarter of the 1st millennium AD can be approximately traced in the former Lusatian area of Ukraine today known as Volhynia.

Settlement of the Venedy near the Pripet Marshes (in present-day Volhynia, between Ukraine and Belarus) in the 5th-8th centuries

This population prospered for five hundred years before the Huns arrived to conquer the area. Although there is no historical evidence, it is intriguing to assume that these Veneti, who descended the Vistula southward, were yet present in Ukraine in the 7th century AD. Unfortunately, there is great confusion over some mysterious medieval quotes that concern the Venedy population owing to the questionable interpretations provided by some historians. During the Caucasian campaign conducted by the Arabic general Salman ibn Rabia (652-653), the ethnonym *V-n-nt-r* (Venender for the Arabs) was found in a letter written by the Khazars. In a somewhat Pindaric style, Artamonov links this ethnonym to the city of Vabanbar – in present-day Dagestan (Caspian Sea) – which was reached by Salman. Some medieval documents then mention how Asparukh, ruler of Bulgaria from 679 to 700 and founder of the so-called First Bulgarian Empire, was also the leader of a population called *V-n-n-tr*, whom he might have taken with him from Kalmykia (Caspian Sea) following the Khazar expansion.

Some references to *Vnnd-r* are again traceable in 982 and in 1094 and regard the Christian nation of Rum, located between the land of the Moravians and that of the Magyars, who were called *Unogundur* (Hungarians) by the Byzantines. This territory – roughly again identifiable as Volhynia – bordered to the south on the springs of the former River Hypanis (the Southern Bug) and on the northern bank of the River Tyras (the Dniester). Both rivers are close to the Venedy settlement in Ukraine, which was located in the southern prolongation of their ancient migration from the Vistula.

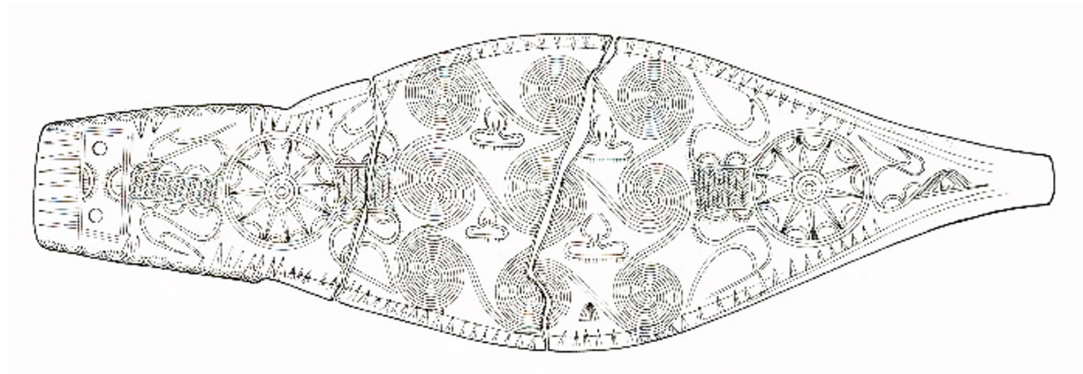
According to Tiziana D'Acchille, the comparative analysis of votive and ritual archaeological finds with written and oral sources of Caucasian folklore has demonstrated that the worship of a Caucasian sun goddess was popular in Georgia between the 3rd millennium and the 6th century BC.

Besides Lake Van in Turkey and Lake Sevan in Armenia, there is also a region called Svaneti or Svanetia, which extends in the north-west of Georgia as far as the Caucasus Mountains. It is the highest inhabited area in Europe, surrounded by mountain peaks that reach 3,000 - 5,000 meters of altitude, including the Ushba peak – perhaps the mountain where Prometheus was chained to while the griffon devoured his liver. The inhabitants of Svaneti (the Svan people) may have been the Sanni already mentioned by Strabo when talking about Colchis. The area where they once lived coincides almost entirely with their present settlement and yet, according to the study of toponyms, it is believed that some of the Svans migrated from Georgia to the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea in the 3rd millennium BC. This Georgian province remained under the kingdom of Colchis and the following reigns until 552, when the inhabitants allied themselves with the Persians. Since the Svans were not Venetic people, it would be useless to seek evidence of this. Nevertheless, they are a very interesting population from an anthropological point of view not only because of their undoubted ancientness and the possible contacts they had with the Eneti of Paphlagonia, but also because they handed down memories of ancient deities (such as the Lord of wolves and Barbali, solar goddess).

Belt with Sun-shaped disk, Nordic priestess of the Bronze Age (Egtved), 1370 BC

Although it seems that the Hittites reached Anatolia from the steppes through Georgia, it was the powerful tribe of the Colchians that named the region in the 2nd millennium. Situated in Western Georgia, Colchis bordered on the Black Sea and was separated from Eastern Georgia by the mountain range of Likhi, which also separates Europe from Asia. Near the Colchian city of Vani, which is situated about 200 km away from the mountains of Svaneti and in the confluence of the Sulori and the ancient Phasis rivers, the ruins of a rich city – whose archaic name is unknown – were excavated. The first settlement is dated from the 8th to the 7th centuries BC, when Vani was an important place of worship.

The intact clothes recovered from the grave of a Bronze Age girl in Egtved (central Denmark), after being subjected to strontium isotope analysis, confirmed that she was not born in Denmark: instead, she was a priestess who had come from



Belt of a Venetic priestess decorated with the pattern of the Solar Boat pulled by two seabirds

the far away island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea or, more probably, from Southern Germany. Her sun-shaped belt disk, which dates back to the 14th century BC (that is, to the beginning of the Lusatian civilization), has the same function and symbolism of the sun belts worn by Venetic priestesses. It, thus, suggests that the typical bronze belt that adorned the Venetic women and priestesses had a Nordic origin.

Interesting is also the fact that we find the same sun-shaped disks of this North European girl in Eastern Georgia and "only" in women's outfits. Some big bronze openwork disks with a diameter of about 20-centimeters were, in fact, found in Kviratskhoveli, in the area of Mtskheta (the ancient capital of Georgia). They date back to the middle of

Sun-shaped belt disk used during rituals dedicated to the sun goddess; from the necropolis of Kviratskhoveli. Ivane Javakhishvili historical museum, city of Akhaltsikhe - former Lomsia (region of Samtskhe-Javakheti).

Belt disk with birds (Solar Boat style) with circular studs along the rim

the 2nd millennium BC, that is, from the 15th to the 13th centuries BC, and were used during rituals dedicated to the Caucasian sun goddess. The solar element is evident in the inner pattern of a swastika with eight arms, which is typically Georgian and considered the most ancient version of the swastika. On the lower part of the disk there are some chains with bird-shaped pendants, which clearly recall the symbolism of the birds pulling the Solar Boat. In the Samtskhe-Javakheti region the rituals dedicated to female deities were thus distinct and different from those dedicated to male deities. In fact, in male cults there were no sun-shaped belt disks but axes from Colchis, sceptres and *rhytons* shaped like a drinking horn. Even the funerals of priests differed from those of priestesses. Sacrificial offerings were not performed during the funerals of women, who were buried only with a wide selection of bright reddish metal jewels. The men were, instead, buried in big graves which were covered with a pile of stones and filled with silver-like metal objects and the head of an ox as a sacrificial offer. The horns and silver may recall a male lunar cult which, coupled with the female solar cult, reminds us of the dichotomous division in the astral and celestial religion of the Hittites. According to the magical-natural views of the time, the Sun is the female abdomen – the source of life and procreation – related to the "solar plexus" whose nerves branch off in a radial form following the celiac artery branches, which supply the organs of the upper abdomen.

Ivane Javakhishvili demonstrated long ago that the ancient Georgians adored the Moon as one of the most important deities. The cult of the lunar god Armaz, to whom bulls were typically offered, survived until the 4th century when it was eradicated by the diffusion of Christianity. Nevertheless, it continued to be secretly practiced until the 7th century in the mountains. The statue of Armaz had been destroyed in the temple of Armazi, the ancient capital of Iberia situated on Mount Bagineti at the confluence of the rivers Baniskhevi and Mtkvari (Kura), that is, near Mtskheta (eastern reign of Kartli). The Georgian historian Giorgi Melikishvili has suggested that the god Armaz could be a local version of Arma, god of the Moon in Hittite mythology. During the Persian-Achaemenid domination (7th-2nd centuries BC) Armaz, or Arimaz, may in turn have influenced the Iranian deity of fire and light, Ahura Mazda, the only God creator of the sensible and the supersensible world in the Zoroastrian religion (also known as Mazdayasna). Moreover, under the Achaemenids, the cult and representation of sacred animals was particularly practiced, as witnessed in the gold diadem from the 5th century BC (25 cm in diameter) which shows the detail of lions biting a bull.

Still today, like at the time of Armaz, bulls are sacrificed in the mountains of Georgia in order to obtain favours and protection. It is interesting to consider how rooted the typical symbolism of the sun and the moon was in Georgia and how it was then mediated and absorbed by the first Christians, who represented bas-relief solar disks and bull heads on the facades of their churches. For present-day Georgians the sun-swastika with eight arms, known as *Borjgali*, is a national symbol which appears even on their legal tender.

Wine-land and crossroads of the most ancient roads which connected Europe with the Far East, Georgia is situated between the Caucasus and Anatolia and is washed by the Black Sea. Colchis was renowned for the mining of alluvial gold by sieving the river water with sheepskin. Moreover, at the end of the 2nd millennium BC Greek mythology celebrated the fifty Argonauts who, guided by Jason, embarked on an adventurous voyage on board the ship Argo, as far as the hostile lands of Colchis in order to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Jason's first challenge was to plough a field after having yoked two bulls that had bronze claws and spit fire from their nostrils. Wanting to protect Jason from the burns caused by the bulls' fire, Medea gave him an ointment made with crocus, the flower grown from the blood of Prometheus, who had been chained on the Caucasus in the area of Colchis. In Greek mythology Crocus was a mortal young man who fell in love with the nymph Smilax and their impossible love found peace only when the gods transformed Crocus into a plant of saffron and the nymph into a flower, so that they could stay together forever.

During the Hellenistic period it was commonly thought that a route connected the Danube and the Mediterranean Sea, so that the ship Argo could enter the Adriatic from the river and then reach Greece. However this version has proven to be false. Equally false is the idea that the ship crossed the Bosphorus since, due to its riptides, the strait was completely impassable until the 7th century BC. In his book *Les Argonautes* Dimitris Michalopoulos has explained that the ship must have instead sailed upstream along one of the two big Ukrainian rivers which flow into the Sea of Azov, that is, the Tanai (the Don) River or the Boristene (Dniepr) River. Beyond the Riphean Mountains, i.e., perhaps the Carpathian Mountains on the left, Argo may have reached the Pripet Marshes and, with difficulty, the bed of the Vistula River in present-day Poland. Finally, by sailing through the Warta River and the Elbe River, it may have reached the sea near the area of present-day Cuxhaven, between Germany and Western Denmark. In other words, the ship simply followed the amber route. Evidence of this can be found in the hypothesis put forward by archaeologists that the beginning of "the gold tradition" was influenced by nomadic populations who came from Eastern Europe and descended along the Dniepr River to Mycenae.

Solar disk from San Pietro di Rosà (Veneto)

Toast of a Lord of the Venetia sitting on the throne, covered with a cloak and with a wide brim hat.

The social system of the ancient Veneti was structured in concentric circles and it was divided according to social role, census and activity. At its heart there was the Lord with the clan-elders. The Lords were eminent figures, among whom the chief of each *pagus* (village) was elected. The Pilpotis was the "Lord of the Citadel", who took part in the collective meetings of the village chiefs and respected the solidarity-based social principle. The Lord was surrounded by the aristocratic caste, which controlled all the profitable activities and made display of its power in corteges or feasts. The village chief could also be a priest, or could simultaneously have both priestly and political functions.

The prevalence of places of worship scattered throughout the region is a clear sign of the importance of religiosity among the ancient Veneti. The restricted circle of priests presided at the celebration of water rites (drinking rituals and offers to water) and fire rites (fire worship and funeral ceremonies). Probably there was a caste of priestesses who lived in sanctuaries with a *scriptorium* (from Latin, literally "a place for writing", that is, a room devoted to written accounts). Custodians of the knowledge of the runes, the priestesses practiced writing and taught it to the people. Below this caste, there was the class of the horsemen, the prototype for medieval chivalry: they reared horses and rode them in battles. The chivalry was the winning factor of the Venetic militia. Horses were extremely dear to the ancient Veneti and their faithful devotion to these animals is proven by the numerous statuettes which reproduce either the horse alone or with its rider. The social class that most characterised the Veneti was that of the merchants who ensured the supply of precious objects and raw materials thanks to their long-distance trades. Below them, but still very esteemed, were the artisans, both the apprentices and the masters of art, who knew the technique of ceramic and metal manufacturing. The bottom of this social scale was occupied by skilled fishermen, farm workers, domestic servants and workmen who did the hard labour necessary for community life.

The basic element for the organization of the village or the city was the extended family with its nearest relatives. The family followed a male breadwinner model where the man had authority over all the members of the family, even if the woman had an equally crucial role and the same dignity of her husband. In fact, women participated actively in social life and were the protagonists of traditional occasions which marked community life: births, marriages and religious feasts. From an early age women learned to spin wool, weave cloth, and work leather and animal hides. All the members of the family cooperated in daily occupations to get food – as breeding cattle and poultry, growing gardens, hunting and fishing, gathering firewood – or, during ceremonies, harvesting the yellow flowers of Ranunculus (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) which were offered to the deities.

The typical clothing of Venetic women

The clothing of the ancient Veneti was characteristic and distinguished them from neighbouring peoples. The only remains of womenswear belonging to the most ancient period (9th-7th centuries BC) were found in the necropolises. Like for the clothes of other ancient peoples, the fabrics were held together with safety pins, with the difference that the Veneti used splendid bronze boat-shaped fibulas. Instead, lozenge-shaped belts of Nordic origin decorated with ceremonial symbols and made in bronze or leather (or fabric for girls) were typical among high rank Venetic women. Mid-calf boots similar to the leather boots worn by the Paphlagonians were a must-have. From the end of the 7th century BC examples of women clothing came from small ex-voto laminas, statuettes and pictorial situlas. The disks representing the goddess Reitia – for example the bronze disk of Montebelluna – offer a clear idea of the way the Venetic women dressed at the time: the dress was calf-length and a big shawl covered both the shoulders and the head (like the *zendàle* of Venetian dames). Ornaments and jewels showed the wealth of the family: spiral-shaped armlets, bracelets, rings, bronze or silver earrings, sometimes pendants on amber or glass-bead necklaces. The richest women wore elegantly sewn clothing, embroidered boots and embossed bronze disks covered sometimes with gold leaf. Little girls wore amulets around their neck.

Evidence of the most ancient menswear also comes from the tombs: big bronze pins with safety caps to hold heavy cloaks, serpentine-arc-shaped buckles in bronze or iron, and big armlets on the deltoids. From the end of the 7th century BC, figurative decorations show short tunics around the collar and sleeves lined with studs and cinched at the waist with a band or cord as a belt. High-rank people wore big cloaks made of heavy fabric which were decorated with many metal studs. On the head they wore elegant wide-brimmed hats or a decorated beret. Shoes had upwards tips.

Menswear of a group from the famous historical re-enactment association "Venetkens"

The armament of Venetic warriors consisted in a double spear because a warrior armed only with a single spear was quickly disarmed; moreover, the head of the spear had the shape of a bay leaf in honour of Apollo. The sword was of the Late Bronze Age

type defined "antenna" where the head of the hilt had the shape of a double symmetric spiral. The shield was round like the ones of Greek *hoplites*. During the fight the shield and sword were synergistically coordinated. The helmet could have the shape of a pointed cone or of a cup with a crest which was similar to a horse's mane. The feared chivalry of the Veneti was a great military power for the time. Cavalrymen rode the famous steeds of the *Venetia* region – the pride of horse breeders – without a saddle. The war chariot was fast, light, two-wheeled and drawn by one or two horses. This cart was not so stable to permit effective fighting while on board; however it was great for moving from one place to another of the battle and was used to break through the enemy line with the strike action or to outflank the infantry and attack it in the rear and in the flank. It was often mounted by two people: a charioteer and an army commander. In times of peace, the chariot and its driver were used by aristocrats. The chariot could have two symmetrical birds at the front and at the rear and sometimes it was mounted also by a noblewoman.

A Venetic warrior represented on the Benvenuti Situla approximately 6th century BC (city of Este)

In the *Venetia* each village had a certain degree of decision-making autonomy. Yet, in case of war or external threat, all the populations of the *Venetia* were bound by a pact of mutual assistance and could pool all the available resources, including their allied Celtic tribes (such as the Cenomani). On these occasions the cities of Este, Padua, Vicenza, Oderzo and Montebelluna were reference centres which guided the entire region. The ancient Veneti were a very hospitable and peaceful people who wanted to achieve prosperity through their craft and commercial ability and not through mugging other peoples. The Venetic Militia had mainly a defensive task in case of external threats and its contingents were mostly spread around the colonies or the outposts along the route trades of the *Venetia*, for example along the *Via Claudia Augusta* in Fließ (Austria), where the quantity of weapons found reveals a well-equipped and numerous army.

The Veneti used perishable materials to build their houses and this is why archaeological finds of this type are rare. The Venetic house was similar to the *casoni* (fishermen's houses) which we can still admire today during boat trips in the Venice lagoon and were made of marsh materials like reed and straw. Their complex construction resulted from a long experience passed down from generation to generation and was effective in protecting

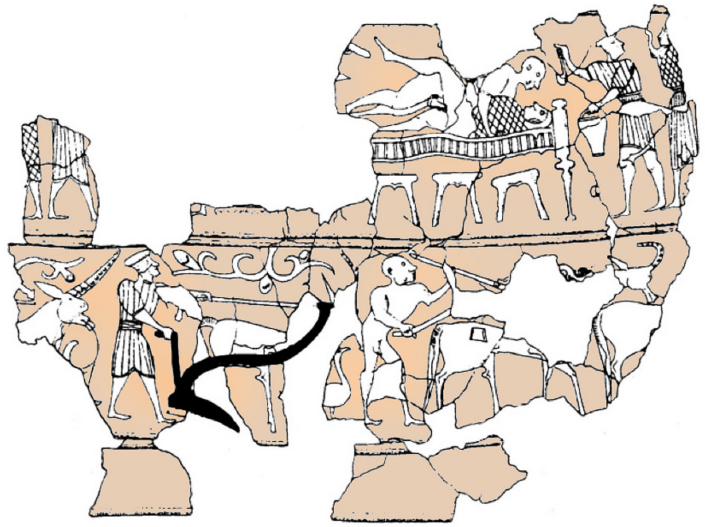
Example of a fishermen's house (casone) from Caorle in Basso Piave. Model by Dario Dorigo, called "Zaba".

both from the heat and the cold. The base was rectangular and the walls were erected with wooden supporting poles stuck deep in the ground; then a layer of beaten earth and simple clay was applied to the structure made with boards and reeds. A very pitched and pointed roof was built by tying together bundles of straw and marsh reeds; then builders applied more and more layers and covered them with moos which gave consistence and uniformity to the structure once it had taken well. Outside, the fishermen's house was surrounded by a low outer border made of stones. Inside the floor was made of dirt floor with carpets upon it; the fireplace stood in the centre and it had an outlet for the smoke on the roof. A characteristic element of the Venetic fireplace was the stone andiron which had the shape of a ram's head and held an iron frame used for supporting the wood and improving combustion. The internal space of the building was dedicated to a household with its nearest relatives and divided into small rooms which had different functions: kitchen, bedroom, cellar for food storage and also a small stable which was part of the house and was isolated with a reed fence. Sometimes the house had areas used as workrooms for craftwork. Inside the house there was a sacred space for worship; in some cases these areas were small temples where the inhabitants put ritual instruments and bowls or other containers with offers to the deities. Finally, the finds show that vegetables and fruits were cultivated in the land around the house.

Since the Veneti found the temperate climate enjoyable and felt safe in the marshy ecosystem of the fauna and the flora of the lagoon, they always built their settlements in harmony with the vital element of water, often on the top of sandy peaks or on an insular flat land (called *Polesine*), which severs from the banks due to erosion. The *motta*, a pile of sand and stones on the river-beds, is an artificial island created in a convenient place to build fishermen's houses. The *motta* of the small settlement of Veronella Alta, which is dated around the first period of the Este culture, is a good example. As the stratigraphy of alluvial deposits near the settlements on the *Venetia* plain prove, around 1000 BC there was a climate change and an increase of the rainfall caused river flooding. This climate favoured the extension of the marshy environment and the growth of an aquatic vegetation in the lagoon. At the time, the main proto-urban centres were situated in the low muddy plain irrigated by many rivers and connected by important waterways.

The high plain was scarcely populated during all the Iron Age probably because the hard, gravelly and sparsely irrigated grounds were not apt for cultivation. Instead, the foothills and the mountain area were densely inhabited from the 5th cent. BC onwards.

In the settlements on the hills and mountains some interesting paleo-botanical elements from burnt seeds prove the cultivation of cereals (millet, barley, oat and ancient varieties of wheat) and of leguminous crops, like broad beans and lentils, also in terraced gardens. In the low plain there were large areas for the cultivation of fodder cereals and hay for grazing livestock. The distribution of wild grapes used for winemaking is clearly demonstrated. Wine and music (e.g., lyre and Pan flute) played a central role in the feasts organised by aristocrats.



Sanzeno Situla. Scene of ploughing and intimacy (the woman evokes the symbolism of the situla and the man that of the libation-ladle).

Agriculture developed respecting the natural cycles by using specific techniques. The *fallow field*, for example, is the practice of letting lands lie fallow after an annual cycle of sowing. Moreover, they rotated cereal and leguminous crops and used slash-and-burn agriculture, that is, the occasional practice of burning the forest to create new arable lands for family and city consumption. The gathering of herbs, wild vegetables and wild fruits was also very important.

An analysis of the bone remains has made it possible to reconstruct which animal species were reared by the ancient Veneti: courtyard ducks and hens, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and horses. Pigs were the main source of meat for human consumption and cattle were used for agricultural drawing and leather, while sheep were shorn to get wool. Wolves had also probably been domesticated, either by breeding their pups or by taming the ones that moved closer to the villages in search of food. On one hand, men used the sense of smell and the speed of wolves to hunt and, on the other, from men wolves (and dogs later) learned how to point, how to recognise facial expressions and how to give an almost specific meaning to their yelps.

Horses were reared in a semi-wild state, that is, in herds which lived in controlled areas and kept in stables during the winter. Horse breeding was the heart of the Venetic communities: stallions were carefully selected and the purity of the Venetic breed was jealously preserved. They cleverly sold only male horses because, if they sold the females too, there was the risk of spreading the autochthonous breed outside of the *Venetia*. Greek and Latin sources speak about the victories in races and the fame of the Venetic horses, which were excellent for long rides and amazed the audience when they pulled the chariot in ceremonies.

San Zuanne di Duino. Resurgences of the Timavo River, a Karstic river mentioned in the Tabula Peutingeriana (Latin for "The Peutinger Map", in the left detail).

The poet Homer was the first to mention the Venetic horse in *The Iliad*, where he writes: "The Paphlagonians were commanded by stout-hearted Pylaemenes from Enetae, where the mules run wild in herds". Strabo, the geographer who was born near Paphlagonia in the 1st century BC, says that Venetic horses – which were admired and appreciated as far as Sicily – were branded with the head of a wolf and were thus called wolf-breed (*cavalli lupiferi*). He also reports that near the splendid waters at the mouth of the Timavo River there was an important place of worship dedicated to Diomedes, to whom the Veneti offered a white horse. He was supposedly responsible for the origin of the shrines of Argive Hera and Aetolian Artemis; both the shrines consisted of wooded enclosures that shut in wild animals. They were also seen as having two sides, a bright one and a dark one, a double nature which was symbolised by the white and black horses that guided men to Otherworld.

Lipica white horse (Slovenia's Karst region)

Fishermen used hooks, fishing nets and boats. Fish bones and shellfish valves have been found among the remains of villages and among the offers put in the graves. Shells were worn around the neck as amulets, just like the shark tooth found in Este.

One of the main occupations of lower-class Venetic women was spinning, which aimed at transforming the crude fibre of wool or linen into the yarn used for weaving cloth and sewing leather. The fibre was first wrapped around a lightweight stick, called *distaff*.

The woman took a small quantity of fibre, twisted it with her fingers and attached it to the *spindle*, a straight spike made of wood and rarely of bone or metal. She rapidly spun the spindle allowing it to wind the fibre, while she drew other fibres from the distaff. When the spindle rotated, it went down perpendicularly due to the weight of the spindle whorl which was situated in the lowest part of the spindle and increased the speed of the spin. The thread was more or less thick depending on the weight and the dimension of the *spindle whorl*. Once the thread was long enough, the spinner spooled it around the spindle and fastened it to the upper part of the spindle, so it would not coil up during the next movement. She thus created the first length of thread for sewing and could start the procedure over again.

There were more spinners than weavers since weaving was a highly-skilled activity. Venetic weavers used vertical looms similar to the ones represented on Greek vases. The looms had a crushproof wooden structure which held the warp, that is, the set of lengthwise yarns that were tied together and held in tension by terracotta weights. Each thread in the warp was passed through a heddle used to separate the warp threads for the passage of the weft. Each heddle had an eye in the centre where the warp was threaded through by using fuses and sticks.

Who was Nerka Trostiaia? She was a Venetic businesswoman in the textile sector, a rich and enterprising aristocratic who lived in Este in the 3rd century BC. The findings from her sumptuous grave – i.e. luxurious fabrics, necklaces made of amber and vitreous paste, splendid gold and silver jewels, an ancient Attic krater and Etruscan vases for banquets, as well as Celtic jewels – show how wide the horizons of her trade were. In her grave archaeologists also found a reproduction of her shop complete with the tools she used for spinning and weaving, including a miniature loom. These are symbolic bronze tools, while the original ones were made of wood. The Venetic women were renowned for their elegant dresses which they tightened at the waist with belts in order to exalt their female bodies. Nerka's prestigious shop might well have been an *atelier*, known and appreciated by many in the city.

Ceramic dates back to the Neolithic period, when men discovered how to transform clay into pottery. Clay is a mix of fine-grained rocks produced by the slow decomposition, and is mainly made up of alkaline earth metals, iron oxide and aluminium silicate minerals. Clay exhibits plasticity when mixed with water in certain proportions. However, with drying, clay becomes firm; when fired, physical and chemical changes occur and convert the clay into a ceramic material or terracotta. In ancient times, after drying, ceramic was covered with wood which was set on fire to create an "open-air" combustion chamber. Subsequently, ceramic was produced by using a kiln, a type of oven, which was built by digging a hole in the ground and covering the hole with boards. In the 7th century BC, the Veneti started to use a potter's wheel to mould the clay: it consisted of a wooden disc placed on a heavy stone wheel or board (flywheel) in order to make it rotate more quickly. Thanks to the centrifugal force, the vase could be shaped by using the potter's bare hands or simple tools.

The typical decorations of the Lusatian civilization, which are also found among the Veneti, are the so-called "fingerprints" placed around the neck of a cinerary urn. This decorative technique then evolved into the use of small round bronze studs, which were put on the urn when the clay was still soft. Red and black paint was obtained by mixing liquid clay with ochre powder, graphite and iron oxide and was applied to the urn with a brush in an alternating pattern. Small stamps with images, such as ducks, were also used to create decorations on fresh clay.

Finds show that vitreous paste was already used in glass manufacturing in Frattesina (in the area of Polesine) in the 12th -11th centuries BC, while later finds were unearthed in Este and Altino. The decorative forms and designs of bead manufacturing were similar to the ones used in Central and Eastern Europe.

No wooden artefacts have, instead, come down to us, since wood is a perishable material and slowly decomposes without leaving any trace. The images on situlas confirm, however, that stylish wooden handicraft was typical of the ruling classes and included richly historiated thrones, beds, chests, and shelves for pottery.

Bronze statue of a warrior (Lagole - Dolomites)

Bronze, an alloy of copper and less than 30% tin, was brought to the *Venetia* in raw blocks which were melted in kilns, melting pots and bellows. To file and decorate the objects after casting the artisans used hammers, anvils, chisels, drills, files and pins. For smaller objects, such as studs, weapons and tools, they used open casting, in which the liquid metal was poured into a monovalve matrix and bivalve mould casting.

Lost-wax casting was the technique typically used for creating bronzes: the wax model was contained in a clay mould and had a top opening into which the liquid metal was poured and a bottom opening to allow the outflow of the liquefied wax. First the clay mould was put in a kiln so as to make the coating harden and the wax melt. Then liquefied bronze was poured into the hardened mould and left to cool so as to take on the desired shape. Once ready, the bronze was released from the mould and refined by hand.

Laminated votive sculptures and belts were made with bronze sheets and masterfully decorated with many symbolic elements. Bronze vases were made by folding and overlapping the ends of a sheet and fixing them with rivets. The hems were folded around a cylinder-shaped metal rod, usually made of lead.

Ferrous metallurgy was used to make tools (hoes, sickles, axes, shears), household utensils (keys, ladles, containers) and weapons (swords, helms, shield bosses). Gold and silver were used for decorative objects such as bullas, earrings, rings and fibulas. Silver was obtained from a process called *cupellation*, which partially oxides some types of galena (such as lead sulphide).

THE INDO-EUROPEAN GODDESS

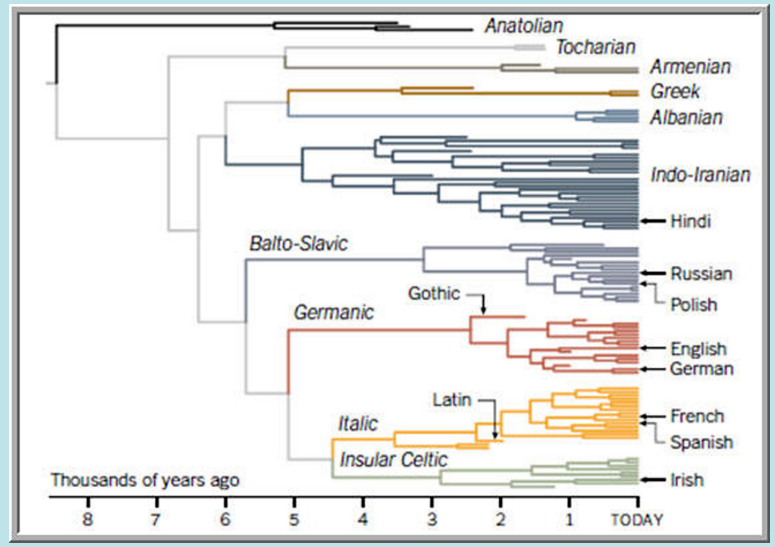
Marija Gimbutas was the first to hypothesize that the first Indo-Europeans who took possession of the continent were an aggressive population made of warriors on horseback, nomads and shepherds, who stole the land of the indigenous farmers thanks to the military superiority of their cavalrymen. Since the Neolithic the indigenous Europeans had venerated the fertility of nature and worshipped the Mother goddess, as witnessed by their numerous statuettes with pronounced feminine curves. During the Neolithic, the Black Sea was a freshwater lake significantly smaller than its present-day dimensions. It is probable that some "non-Indo-European" populations reached its shores after a period of aridity and found a favourable environment for trade and agriculture there. Around 5600 BC, an unexpected flood – which probably inspired the Deluge – led to the fall of the Bosphorus barrier and consequently the Black Sea reached its present water's level. Gimbutas focused on Anatolia as the cradle of the goddess cult, without considering that the subsequent populations – the Pala people, the Lydians, the Lycians, the Carians and the Hittites – were Indo-European populations who spoke Indo-European languages. The Lithuanian archaeologist also seems to forget that the goddess cult was practiced not only in Anatolia, but also all over the Europe during the Neolithic. Influenced perhaps by first-wave feminism of the 1970s, she believed that the "male chauvinism" of the Indo-Europeans is visible in their male deities who were at the top of the religious system pyramid. It cannot certainly be denied that Greek deities had Zeus as king of the gods and that the Greeks always tried to appropriate themselves of the more ancient Anatolian Mother goddess' cult in order to suppress it. In fact, Zeus liked entertaining sexual relations with an incredible number of goddesses with the aim of acquiring and submitting their religious power. However, according to Gimbuta's "Kurgan hypothesis" (kurgan is a type of burial mound), there were three expansion waves of the Proto-Indo-European speakers: first wave in 4400-4300 BC, second wave in 3500 BC and third wave in 3000-2800 BC. All these waves were long before the Greek civilization, which was born in the 10th century BC and reached its maximum splendour between the 6th century and the 4th century BC, coming to an end when the Mycenaeans invaded Greece.

Like the Greeks, even the Veneti came much later than the first Indo-European migrations. They descended from the Indo-Europeans and spoke an Indo-European language, but their main divinity was female: the goddess Reitia [*Reìzxia*]. The fact that they seemingly practiced a Neolithic matriarchal religion, thus, "contradicts" Gimbutas' theory. Moreover, the Venetic social structure did not include only cavalrymen, hunter-gathers and farmers, but also the new-born social class of the long-distance merchants, who were neither aggressive nor sedentary. Zvelebil has recently stressed the idea – also supported by the British archaeologist and paleolinguist Colin Renfrew – that the expansion of the Indo-European culture was facilitated by clever and talented pioneers, the interweaving of different elites and trading goods. Moreover, this expansion does seem to follow not only the agricultural route through Greece and the Balkans, but also the one of the big Ukrainian rivers which led to the Baltic.

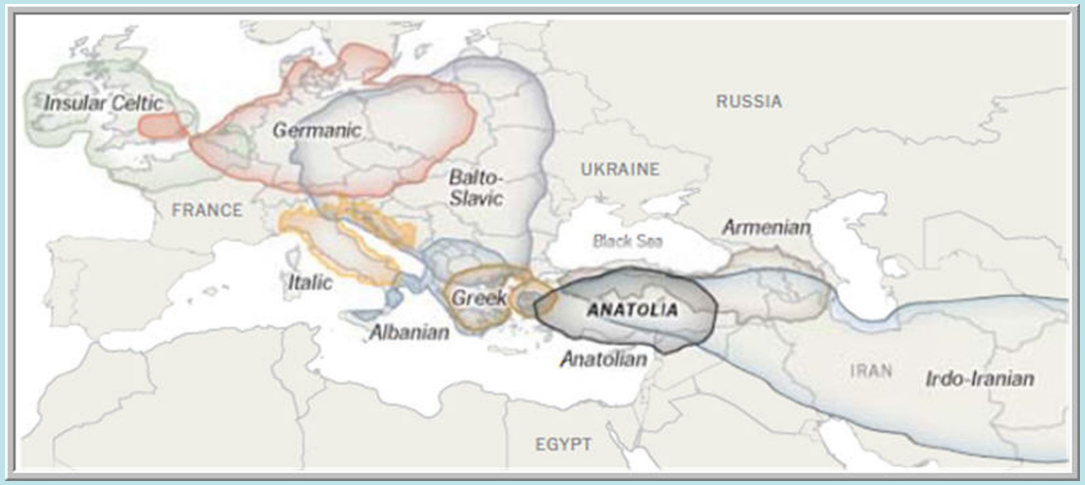
Colin Renfrew's hypothesis argues that the Indo-Europeans did not move with the spread of war horses, which were perhaps pacifically used for the transport of goods. According to him, there is no proof that the Indo-Europeans had a patriarchal society nor that they were conquerors; on the contrary, they were pacific farmers who moved from Anatolia with the progressive spread of farming among the local hunter-gathers. In fact, the practice of using horse riding for military purposes gained importance in Southern Europe only around 1200 BC. Some centuries before, the importance of the horse had originated in the Anatolian kingdom of "Isuwa", that means 'land of horses' and is situated on the border with Van Lake, which is according to some the most ancient homeland of the Veneti. Later, the fame of the Paphlagonian Venetic horses continued in Anatolia.

Who were the first cavalrymen of Europe? Were they the Indo-Europeans from the steppes or the Proto-Veneti who moved from Anatolia to the Baltic and determined the start of the Lusatian civilization in 1200 BC? It may be objected that Venetic horses were not used for war but for races and that the mythical Pelops, king of the Veneti, did not ride a horse but a chariot. This chariot drawn by horses would anyhow indicate a previous date, but cannot be dated before 1600 BC because during the third wave – when the Proto-Indo-European language started to split itself into its daughter languages – the chariots of 3000-2800 BC were drawn by cattle and not by horses.

The diatribe between the followers of Gimbuta's hypothesis, who argues that the Indo-Europeans proceeded from the steppes and that of Colin Renfrew, who argues that they originated in Anatolia, has recently reached a turning point thanks to the contribution of the complete linguistic study led by Quentin Atkinson from the University of Auckland in New Zealand. The study is based on the existing vocabulary and geographical distribution of 103 Indo-European languages which were analysed by using a computer in order to identify their most probable origin. According to this study, the origin of the European languages was located in Anatolia and is compatible with the expansion of the farmers from their Anatolian homeland between 8,000 and 9,500 years ago. This outcome strongly supports Renfrew's hypothesis, which was first put forward in 1987.



Just as the Indo-European language split itself into its daughter languages, the original Indo-European goddess spread among each Indo-European population with a different name. *Meter Theon*, that is 'Mother of the Gods',



Propagation area of the Indo-European languages from Asia Minor: Anatolian, Armenian, Indo-Iranian, Greek, Albanian, Balto-Slavic (including Venetic), Italic, Germanic, Celtic. Extract from Quentin Atkinson.

was the name used to call both Cybele and the Greek goddess Rhea. These two deities must have had a common origin in the same Indo-European goddess: the Proto-Indo-European word *mether* is the original word for *mater* (Latin), *mother* (English), *mutter* (German), *madar* (Persian), *matke* (Polish) and *mat* (Russian). Thus, Kubaba for the Hittites, Cybele for the Phygians and Rhea for the ancestors of the Greeks, are among the most ancient deities deriving from the same Indo-European Mother goddess. Later, the Mother goddess split herself into Brigit for the Celts, Freyja for the Scandinavians, Rhea Silvia for the Romans, Northia for the Etruscans and Reitia for the Veneti. Added to the root of the name *Rhea*, the Palaic *tijaz* ('god/goddess') – where Tiyaz was the Palaic god of the Sun – probably gave rise to the name of Reitia.

The Montebelluna disk represents the goddess Reitia with a wolf and an unidentified bird which could be aquatic: because of its collar it may be a mallard – the most common duck of the northern hemisphere and the ancestor of most domestic ducks – the male having a dark green head and white collar. Otherwise it could be a swan or a heron with a long neck and legs, since mallard wings and swan eggs were found in some necropolises in Este and Padua. Strabo linked the wolf with the *cavalli lupiferi*, the Venetic horses marked with a wolf head, as we can also see on the miniature divan engraved with four horses chased by a wolf and found in Nerka Trostiaia's tomb.

How did Cybele's lion become Reitia's wolf? The main Anatolian deities were associated with the lion, which represented the gregarious predator at the top of food pyramid. In the rest of Europe the lord of the forests was instead the wolf, which had the same function as the lion, since it is also a gregarious animal at the top of the food pyramid. Moreover, the wolf and the swan are symbolic animals for the Hyperborean cult, especially for Apollo. Iconography shows how the aquatic bird is linked to the most important symbol for Reitia, that is the *Solar Boat* which carries the sun on the water and is always held in the hand of the goddess as a bipartite sceptre or *Magic Key*.

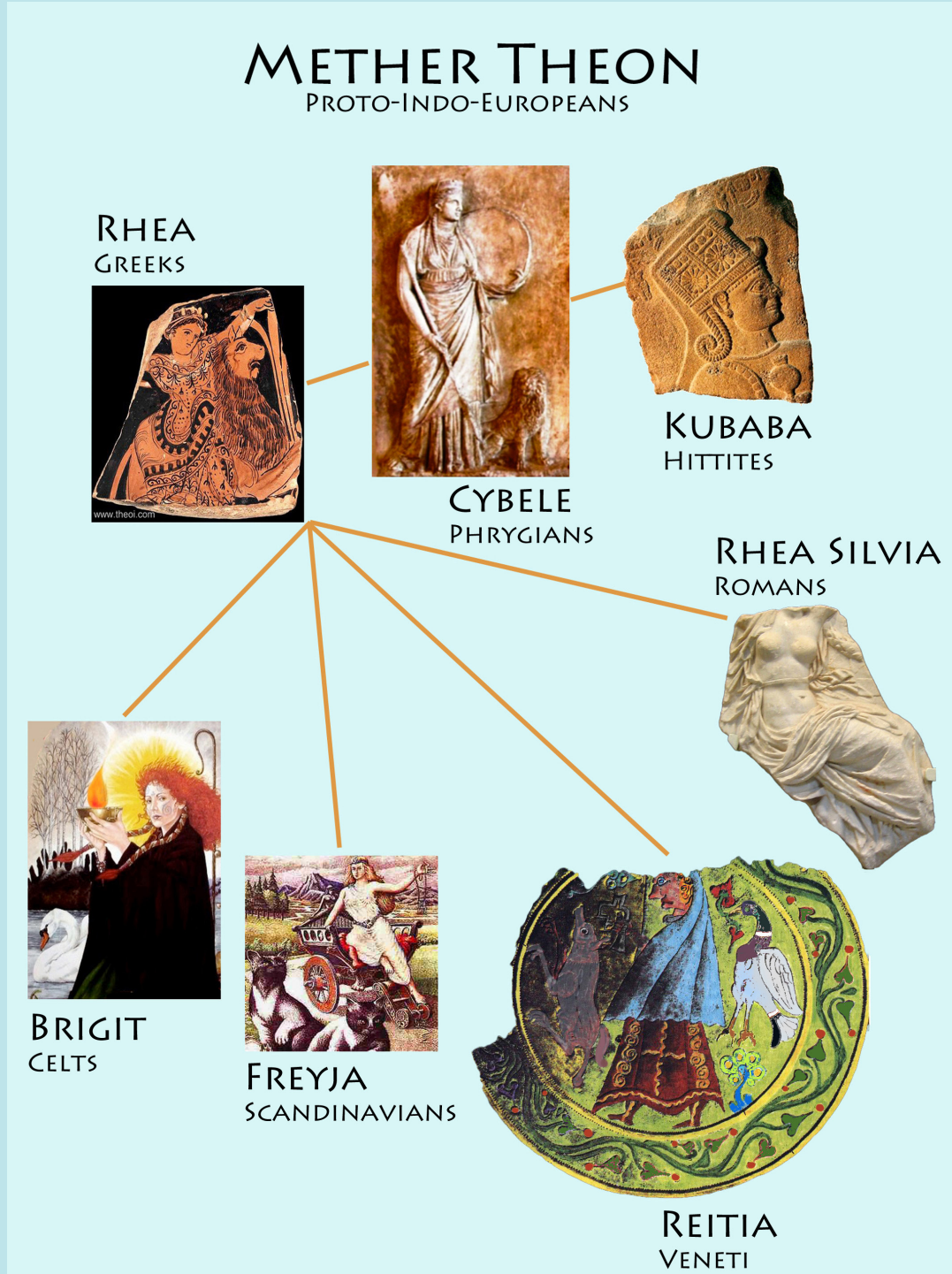
Paola Pisi, professor of History of Religions at "La Sapienza" University of Rome, has recently argued that the myth of the Mother goddess is only a product of late 19th century Romanticism, for which the theory of matriarchy put forward by Swiss anthropologist Bachofen can be considered responsible. The *apriori* concept of the existence of a Mother goddess myth was unquestionably accepted and then assumed as true by Nietzsche and also by Gimbutas, who was influenced by Jung's archetypal theory, which transformed Bachofen's theories into an eternal "psychological" truth. Another uncritical approach would be provided by Mircea Eliade, who took the archetype category not from Jung but from the Indologist Ananda Coomaraswamy. The surprising conclusion reached by Paola Pisi is that the Mother Goddess cannot be eliminated from our hermeneutic horizon only because it is an "extremely modern" myth which from the Romantics onwards has become an irrepressible necessity for modernity.

For two centuries the Native European Faith tolerated both the pseudo-scientific interpretations of Jungian psychoanalysis and various anthropological hypotheses which were declared outdated in a short period of time. The mythological tradition continues instead to last millennium after millennium. Paola Pisi's theory is acceptable only if we ignore the precise definitions of the Mother goddess handed down from the ancients. According to Hesiod, Gaia was born after Chaos and bore the Sky, the Hills and the Sea *without sweet union of love*, i.e., with no father. Not only Gaia was inserted in a myth but had a specific cult among a certain ancient population. It is thus evident that the Mother Goddess myth was born before Hesiod and not in the 19th century. Paola Pisi refuses the idea that Gaia controlled nature: she forgets that Gaia, "the Earth", was linked to the natural elements she herself had created and that a huge number of ancient goddesses are represented as "The Mistress of the Animals", including the goddess Reitia.

She then refuses the idea that the Madonna's virginity was an element which Christians took from previous pagan religions, but her argument that "virginal maternity was totally absent in the ancient world" is a false assumption. In Egyptian mythology, Horus was the son of Isis, who was called *Great Virgin* in many pre-Christian texts. Gaia bore sons without a father and, according to the Phrygian Cybele's myth, the Nymph of the Sangarius River became pregnant of Attis when an almond from a tree fell on her lap (so it can be presumed that she was still a virgin). The Virgin Cybele was also known as Mater Megale, that is, the Mother goddess Rhea.

Rhea Silvia was the Vestal Virgin who gave birth to Romulus and Remus. The Greek god Dionysos was said, in one version of the myth, to be the son of Zeus out of the virgin goddess Persephone. The pre-Christian virgin goddess Myrrha was the mother of the god Adonis, who tradition holds was born at Bethlehem. According to Walker, Myrrha was identified with Mary by early Christians, who called Jesus's mother Myrrh of the Sea.

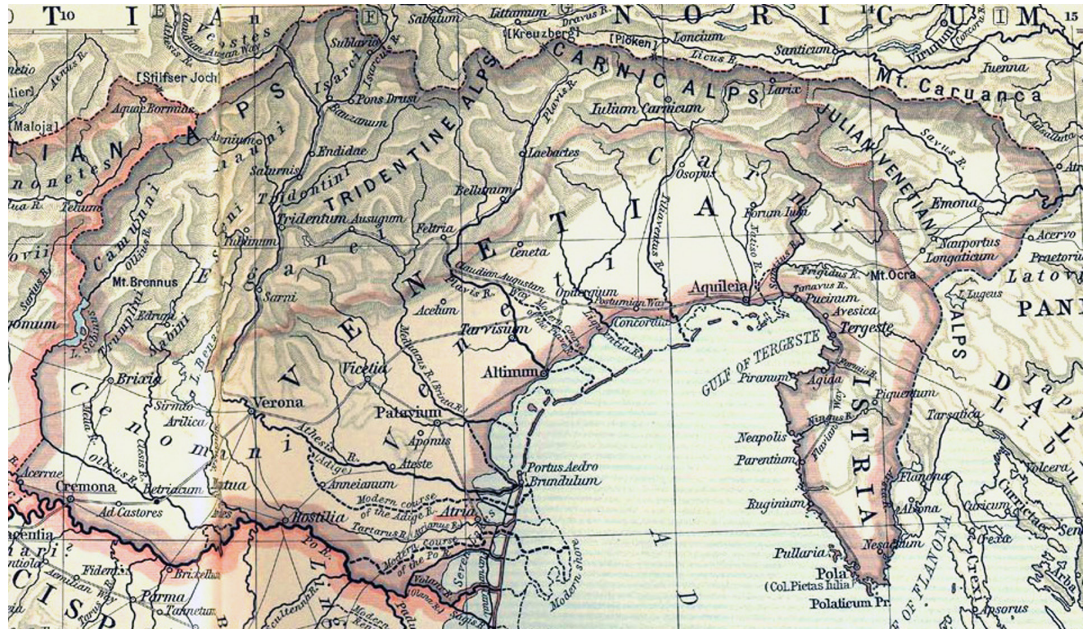
Lastly, questionable is also her argument that "no one has ever thought about theorizing the birth of all the male deities in the ancient pantheons as hypostases of an original Great Father". This is yet another misconception, since Zeus had forty children and the beloved *Apollo Patroos* is "the Apollo of the Fathers".



The variants of the Proto-Indo-European Mother goddess according to the Hittites (Kubaba), the Phrygians (Cybele), the Greeks (Rhea), the Romans (Rhea Silvia), the Celts (Brigit), the Scandinavians (Freyja) and the Veneti (Reitia).

In which place outside the Adriatic do we have certain archaeological evidence about a settlement of the classical Veneti? The excavations headed by E.G. Jerem (1950-1966) led to the amazing discovery of an alleged Venetic village in Szentlőrinc (Hungary), 20 km away from Pécs and not far from the Croatian border. It is a site that was approximately active between 440 and 340 BC and includes 53 inhumation and only 8 cremation graves, as well as some horse burials. Michel Lejeune reported the presence of inscriptions in the Venetic alphabet and language. Szentlőrinc is, thus, the eastern-most epigraphic site, along with the neighbouring sites of Gurina (in Austria) and Idria, Ptuj, Škocjan (in Slovenia). The most interesting votive text is the one dedicated to Reitia: *mego Urleia toler Reitia.i.*, where *toler*, the same verb of Lagole, is used to indicate the offer to Reitia from a devout woman named Urleia. Objects and texts were locally produced and not imported. This fact would imply the presence of a cult of the goddess even in Pannonia, and it would therefore question the idea of an only local Paduan cult and oppose the attempt to reduce Reitia's prominence made by some archaeologists. Lejeune wonders whether the Adriatic Veneti had some "isolated" and far-away outposts – amidst the local populations – to control a large continental trading route, that connected the *Venetia* to Greece through the Danube and the Balkans, or if the entire region of Pannonia was mainly Venetic, so that the village of Szentlőrinc would simply be the first witness of this. Lejeune ends up preferring the second supposition, which is also the broadest view. The necropolis in Pannonia ended its activity in the 4th century, before the arrival of the Celts in the Danube valley.

Once again, archaeological data seems to confirm the words of a classical author: Pliny the Elder, in fact, wrote that *the Veneti who were near Pannonia and scattered around the Adriatic were the traders that made amber famous*. However, academics at the Venetian University "Ca' Foscari" have risen doubts about Michel Lejeune, who would have erroneously fallen for an alleged *corpus* of inscriptions from the Hungarian site, which was presented to the scientific community as "Venetic" by the Hungarian linguist J. Harmatta, a former student of Lejeune in Paris. Enthusiastic about this revelation, the eminent French linguist would have overlooked the total lack of photographic reproductions, the unconditioned and therefore appalling regularity and banality of the linguistic and epigraphic data and, even more unjustifiable, the obliteration of the epigraphs by the archaeologist E. G. Jerem, who supervised the excavations (a fact that is per se quite telling as there would not have been any reason to hide the pleasure of such an exceptional discovery). In other words, there are the gloomy premises for a mystery, in which the French scholar, then in his eighties and dragged by his enthusiasm, would have been enticed by a fake. The great echo that accompanied the discovery was even suspected of having the hidden political motive of "reopening old issues" on the ethnicity and origins of the Paleo-Veneti. The archaeological mystery deepens. Yet, the drawings of the inscriptions were present in the scientific article: was Harmatta the joker who masterfully invented them on purpose? Or, as often happens, did the inscriptions crumble when they came into contact with air?



The X Regio Venetia et Histria, including Western Slovenia (Emona was the current Ljubljana).

Some say with indignation that the ancient *Venetia* region had never been colonised by the Romans; others, on the contrary, tend to excessively insist on the Roman subjection of the *Venetia* and connect all considerations to the indisputable centrality of Rome. Perhaps, it is an exaggeration – as Francesca Veronese does – to describe: "A Roman conquest which, in a short span of time led to the complete transformation of the *Venetia* into a Roman reality". The concept of "complete" transformation can certainly arouse doubts, since it is unthinkable that the Veneti may have totally given up every form of local self-government and their ancient cultural traditions under the pressure of a community that was less ancient than theirs. The suspicion is that behind this extremist position there may be a lack of scientific rigor in favour of the permanence of obsolete stereotypes. Evidence and actual events can give a more moderate and objective view on the complex problem of the interaction between the two peoples. It is worthwhile to begin by re-evaluating first the neutral factors, then the elements in favour of Romanization and, finally, those that tend to exclude it. It is also necessary to consider the influence of other cultural factors that cannot be directly related to Roman control, alongside the impact of other non-Roman populations with migratory flows to the *Venetia* region. The conclusions should be divided between Romanization as a phenomenon in which the indigenous population is "substituted" by the newcomers and Romanization as a cultural phenomenon, that is, only as a cultural influence without a replacement of the population. It is obvious that the term "colonization" can only be used in the first case.

Let's start by listing the neutral factors. In the 4th century BC the Veneti established an alliance with Rome during Brenno's attack to the city. The formal basis of this collaboration comprised cultural aspects as well, namely, the celebration of the common Trojan origins of the two peoples. We just need to remember that the legend of Antenor, founder of Padua, developed before the Roman legend of Aeneas, founder of Rome, since it circulated in Athens already in the 5th century BC). At this time no submission to the Roman leadership can be claimed. There was simply a normal alliance between the two peoples, even if the idea of a cultural exchange between the dominant Latin world and the evolved society of the *Venetia* prevails. The *Venetorum angulus* ('corner of the Veneti') had so far not experienced any phenomenon of colonization.

During the 2nd century BC Rome's political expansion entered into the territorial management of the *Venetia* region's transport routes: the Romans undertook the creation of new thoroughfares and the reconstruction of the *Venetia*'s old roads. Since these roads involved the *Venetia* not only for the passage of the legions, but also for commercial purposes, they were well-received by the Veneti. Not only did they increase communication between the two peoples, including cultural exchanges, but also slowly favoured an imperceptible transfer of the population, which in the long run influenced the development of small Roman communities in the main cities of the *Venetia*.

The *X regio Venetia et Histria*, which stretched eastward as far as Emona (Ljubljana), was one of the *regiones* in which Augustus divided Italy around the year 7 AD. However, Augustus' regions were short-lived and never became intermediate bodies between the central government and the local urban areas (probably this was beyond Augustus' intention), nor did they ever have political or administrative functions.

In the 5th century BC the Carni Celts arrived in Friuli. The coexistence between the Veneti and the Carni seems to have been peaceful. However in 187 BC a new wave of 12,000 Carni and their families settled in Southern Friuli, arousing the concern of the natives of the *Venetia* who turned to the Romans for help. Legions were sent to destroy the *novum Gallorum oppidum* (183 BC) and the Roman Senate decreed the right to establish a new Latin colony "within the territory of the *Venetia*" over an area of 45,000 hectares with the help of 3,000 infantry, 240 knights and 45 centurions led by the triumvirs. The process of real "Romanization" thus began with the division of the colony of Aquileia, an area confiscated to the Veneti, and with the construction of an articulated road network. Crucial roadways departed in fact from Aquileia: the Via Gemina between Aquileia and Emona, the Via Postumia towards Genoa and the Via Annia which crossed Central and Southern Italy through Bologna and Adria. In the city of Aquileia the Veneti took the opportunity to expand their trade relations with the vast market offered by the Roman world. The *Tabula Peutingeriana* – named after Conrad Peutinger of Augsburg in the 16th century – is a Roman military road map in which the importance of Aquileia is emphasised on a par with Rome, Antioch and Constantinople. It seems that at least two editions of the Tabula preceded the one of the Middle Ages: one dating back to the 3rd century, during the expansion peak of the Roman Empire, and the other at the turn of the 4th and 5th century. The stratified Roman roads revolutionised transportation, transforming it from fluvial into terrestrial (since wagons could cross the roads bordering the rivers only with great difficulty). It is known that the amber road, which passed along the Isonzo (Soča) River and the Karst Plateau, was more active "before" the Roman period. This suggests that a Veneti's marketplace was already located in the area where Aquileia would rise, at the junction between the Torre and Natisone rivers in a picturesque lagoon that never freezes.

Here are other facts objectively in favour of the consistency of Romanization:

- long before the Roman colonization, militias from the *Venetia* and from Aquileia participated to the Carthaginian invasion on Hannibal's side in the Second Punic War (228-201 BC). Rome however won the war and strengthened its position in the north-east where it established new administrative areas (magistracies) assigned to the prefects.
- In Padua the well-known rebellion (*seditio*) inside the city in 175 BC was repressed and solved by the consul M. Aemilius Lepidus upon request of a faction of Paduans. The aim of this rebellion was not clear but Rome, de facto, exercised a superior control. Witness of the power taken by the Roman magistrates over the issues of the *Venetia* region can be found in four other epigraph documents of the Euganean and Berico territory between the cities of Padua, Vicenza and Este.
- A crucial phase is represented by events subsequent to the social war that had ripped apart the whole Italian peninsula (90-89 BC). At that time, the Roman government granted Latin rights to all the communities between the Po and the Alps. The main cities of the *Venetia* became Latin colonies and acquired the right of residence and vote in Rome, the right of marriage to Roman citizens and the right to gain full Roman citizenship after having held a public position in the city of origin. Furthermore, essential was also the acquisition of the *ius commercium*, thanks to which the communities of the *Venetia* could enter into direct business relationships with the immense mercantile world of the Romans.
- During the Roman civil wars of the 1st century AD the Veneti sided with the losing faction and this caused a Roman occupation, the expensive maintenance of the imperial troops of the winning side, heavy taxes and the gradual reduction of privileges.
- Many Veneti were part of the Imperial Senate during the Roman Empire and they also held important positions: the fact that they did their career in Rome and not in the *Venetia*, clearly indicates where the political power was. Publius Clodius Thrasea Paetus was an orator and philosopher from the *Venetia* with senatorial dignity in Rome (in the 1st century). Born in Padua, he maintained close bonds with his city as evidenced by his participation to the festivities in honour of the founder of the city, Antenor. Tacitus attests that Thrasea Paetus was unanimously remembered as the last great senator of Republican Rome for his coherence in the defence of the Republic, when the Empire was inexorably sliding into dictatorship. He was sentenced to death by Nero for his opposition to his will and dominance and his corruption of Roman traditions.
- The Veneti of the Northern Adriatic are not mentioned in the Tabula Peutingeriana; perhaps this is a sign of their administrative absorption into the Roman assortment.

- The local identity of the north-eastern territories was still visible even in the Late period and persisted, for example, in the *Marca foroiuliensis* (the March of Friuli which had the same boundaries of the *Regio X*) at the time of Charlemagne. However, the name chosen for this area indicates the progress of Romanization, because it shows how the region no longer gravitated around the centre of Padua but on the more Romanized part, the one of the *Forum Julii*.

The evidence that counters the concept of the Romanization of the Veneti seems to be rather scarce and should be inserted in the right chronological and topographical context:

- Massimiliano Pavan and Elisabetta Todisco agree that until the end of the 1st century BC two distinct areas with different intensity of Romanization should be identified in the *Regio X*: the *Tridentine-Veneta*, comprising the Val d'Adige, and the *Veneto-Istrian*, which included Aquileia and *Forum Julii*. The former had few fully Romanized centres and a clear persistence of the indigenous culture. In the Alpine valleys the incomplete Romanization was proven by the graves of the veterans of the legions, whose name was written with indigenous influences and there is a lack of the typical Roman patronymic (that is, the part of the person's name that indicates paternal ancestry). However, the fact that legionaries were recruited in the cities of the *Venetia* (Ateste, Patavium, Hatria, Mantua, Concordia, Tarvisium, Acelum, Opitergium, Feltria, Vicetia, Verona, Brixia, Camuni) is not against Romanization.
- The natives recruited for the legions returned to their land when discharged, despite having partly assimilated the Roman costumes and mentality during their military service. There was also the phenomenon of the non-native veterans who chose to invest the *praemium* of their discharge in the booming activities of the *Veneto-Istrian* area.
- The remains of the beautiful old villas, whose architecture could suggest that they were owned by the Romans, actually belonged to the rich merchants of the *Venetia*. They used to build and adorn their houses according to the fashion, architecture, materials, aesthetics and techniques of the time.
- The epitaphs of the necropolis of Este witness a transition from a full Venetic structure (characterised by the writing, language, form and onomastics typical of the *Venetia*) through an intermediate stage in which forms from both cultures coexist, to a final stage in which the epitaphs are Latin except for the local onomastic bases. Michel Lejeune, who studied the tombstones, points out the succession of temporal phases: in the same gravestone at the beginning – before the 1st century – there is the coexistence of the *Venetic* language and the *Venetic* alphabet; in the intermediate phase there is the coexistence of the *Venetic* language and the *Latin* alphabet; finally, at the beginning of the 1st century and with the arrival of Christianity, there is the stabilization of the final stage with a *Latin* language and a *Latin* alphabet. In the intermediate stage, the "surname" appears alongside the name: this means that the transition to the Roman *gentilicius* system (pertinent to the *gens*, 'the ancestry') is slightly prior to the full use of the Latin in the *Venetia*, where Venetic names were solely based on the "idionym", that is, the person's proper name – which was only optionally associated with the patronymic. Latin had instead three elements: first name + ancestry name (surname) + patronymic. In Este Lejeune found four major families: *Ennii*, *Rutilii*, *Titinii* and *Aemilii*. These are not the noble names of Roman immigrants to the *Venetia*, but those of indigenous *Venetia* region's families which adopted the style of the Roman name. These Romanized names from Este would, therefore, indicate a Romanization that is not a population replacement, but simply a cultural exchange. In support of this, like the preceding populations of Este, these four *gentes* practiced cremation, used the same kind of urns and the same kind of burial in urnfields. This does not, however, apply to all the archaeological finds in the *Venetia*: other authors, in fact, discovered funerary objects that were typically Roman.
- Perhaps the most striking consideration of the lack of a "total" Romanization of the *Venetia* is the fact that a few centuries later a state, with typical features of the *Venetia* structure, was created: the first doge Paolo Lucio Anafesto was the *Dux Veneticorum* in 697, when the Byzantine province of the *Venetia maritima* – that was previously ruled by Tribunes - was transformed into a duchy. At the time of his duchy the city of Venice had not yet been formed and the very first ducal residence was located in Heracliana, a thriving centre of the *Venetia Lagoon*, which today is called Eraclea in the Lower Piave (San Dona di Piave). Paolo Lucio Anafesto, whose name *Paulo of Oderzo* reveals his origins from the city of *Opitergium*, presumably negotiated the boundaries of the insular city with Liutprand, the king of the Lombards (or Longobards). Heracliana was formerly known as Melidissa and the first settlements were formed during the late Roman period, when the Barbarian invasions forced the inhabitants of the hinterland and of the cities located along the *Via Annia* to seek refuge in the *Venetia lagoon*. Although today this marshy environment appears smaller and fragmented, it originally formed a continuum which comprised all the *Venetia* coast and part of the Friulian coast, extending to the mouth of the Isonzo and of the Po rivers. The sea was divided from the lagoon basin by sandy coasts, called "lidi", interspersed by the mouths of several rivers whose delta opened inside the lagoon.

During the Bronze Age, the lower plain in the south of the springs – between the Tagliamento and the Aussa-Corno Rivers (a few kilometres from Aquileia) – was involved in a systematic distribution of the population with many small and medium-sized settlements usually aligned along the water sources. In Terzo d'Aquileia (in the Ca' Baredi area) a proto-historic residential area, which dates back to 1200-1500 BC, was unearthed. The hearths found therein were used between the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age. This means that this site testifies the undisputed antiquity of the habits in the area of Aquileia even if it is more ancient than the official establishment of the Veneti people. However we cannot exclude a subsequent arrival of Proto-Veneti: indeed the pottery findings appear to be influenced not only by the style of the *Karst-Istrian Castellieri* but also by the Veneto-Paduan features and, in addition, they bear traces of the Urnfield culture of the middle-Danube area. Even the fragments of the double-edge rim found at the Castelliere of Gradiscje of Codroipo and in various other locations of Friuli belong to the style of the Urnfield culture of Austria.

In 452 Attila managed to penetrate into the city of Aquileia, destroying it. Some claim

that he was called by Pope Leo to get rid of Rome's enemy. They also claim that at the encounter at the Mincio he might have delivered the reward. Finally, in the 6th century, a sort of tsunami devastated the swamp, the rivers retreated and Aquileia was definitely abandoned. Only in 1031, in a depopulated village, Popone rebuilt the church destroyed by Attila and in 1070 the first constitution of the Patriarchy of Aquileia was drafted.

In order to understand the ethnogenesis of the Veneti, alongside the Roman influence, other cultural influences and migrant peoples need to be considered, namely, the Goths and the Lombards who migrated from the north, the Franks of Charlemagne, the Byzantines of the Exarchate of Italy and the Celtic tribes who were pressing at the borders. Nor should we forget the lasting influence of Christianization, which was somewhat "transversal" to all the peoples. Whereas the Romans were usually tolerant toward the culture and religion of their allies and this allowed the ancient beliefs of the Veneti to flourish and develop alongside the Roman ones (not so for their Celtic enemies as evidenced by the treatment reserved to the Druids), the impact of Christianization was substantially different. It led, in fact, to the almost total eradication of the beliefs and probably of many popular habits and customs of the *Venetia*. As in the rest of the Empire, even in the *Venetia* the death penalty was introduced for those who practiced pagan rituals (year 356). The Emperor Theodosius the Great (408-450) pursued this practice and put to death even children for playing with the ruins of pagan statues. He was the last emperor to rule over a unified empire and made Christianity obligatory and the only religion allowed. The absence of "literature" in Venetic language is probably not due "to the barbarity" of the Veneti but to the systematic destruction of all the Venetic writings by the Christians of the first centuries. This was done for fear that these writings contained references to paganism (even if they were unintelligible). This was similar to what happened to the writings of pre-Columbian populations; they contained advanced knowledge of astronomy and medicine but were destroyed by the priests because – despite their being completely incomprehensible – they were deemed contrary to the Christian religion.

Broadly speaking, the short analysis on the impact of the Roman presence in the *Venetia* allows us to state that the Romans colonised the Veneto-Istrian area of Aquileia with a replacement of the population. The same cannot be said for the Tridentine-Veneto area. Rome gradually extended throughout the *Venetia* its influence, which can rightly be defined as Romanization, although here in the sense of a process of assimilation and "cultural" integration. This phenomenon, however, seemed to have been "a surface one" with a more hegemonic than imperialist disposition and it would have not deeply affected the age-old local culture. Strabo confirmed that even in the Augustan age the Veneti maintained an independent cultural identity. Soon after, with Christianization a radical change would instead have been introduced in the Venetic culture, resulting in its full and total homogeneity with the Latin Christianity. Some replacement of population even in the Tridentine-Veneto area is probably a late phenomenon, and at the beginning it was limited to the pressures of Julius Caesar in the eastern area of Oderzo. It then increased with the Celtic migrations (with the infiltrations of populations at the borders) and continued in a more marked way over the centuries with the barbaric invasions.

The idea that the process of Romanization occurred simply as a one-way civilization "of the barbarians" has long been abandoned. To explain the dynamics of the relationships between the Veneti and the Romans it is necessary to emphasise the reciprocity of the cultural phenomena that occurred in the *Venetia*. First of all, we should keep in mind that the genesis of the Veneti people was prior to the founding of Rome (753 BC). The myth that Rome was founded by Romulus has acquired some possible historical evidence since the discovery of an ancient city wall (probably the "Wall of Romulus") which dates back to 730 BC. The wall, situated on the Palatine Hill, was made of tufa blocks and bears traces of joints on the top, a palisade and a ditch.

For ancient authors the problem of the origins was at the root of the history of every people. The Romans exploited the legend of a common lineage that linked both the Roman people, progeny of the Trojan hero Aeneas who had arrived at the mouth of the River Tiber, and the Veneti people, progeny of the Trojan Antenor who founded the city of Padua after the destruction of Troy. The two legend inspired by Homer's *Iliad* substantially agrees with historical reality: the first ethnic nucleus that shaped Italy's protohistory can be identified between the 2nd and 1st millennium BC after the fall of the maritime power of Mycenae in the Mediterranean. This is roughly the period in which the ancient authors placed the arrival in the *Venetia* of the Eneti from Paphlagonia, that is, shortly after the Trojan War between the 13th and 12th centuries BC – a period of great migrations. Curiously enough, the Raboso Piave and Prosecco wines are not indigenous vine varieties (despite having been present in the *Venetia* for 3,200 years), but came directly from the origin of the grapevine (Georgia and Armenia) and, according to legend, were brought to the *Venetia* by the ancient Veneti who followed the Trojan Antenor.

The tradition that dates the foundation of Padua in 1183 BC by a group of Veneti led by Antenor agrees with the archaeological finds of prehistoric settlements dating back to the 11th and 10th centuries BC. At the borders of the Adige-Brenta district the centres of Padua and Este were complete in the 8th century BC and an authoritative source like Giulia Fogolari sustains that the people who settled in the *Venetia* region came at the end of the 2nd millennium, bringing with them the previously unknown iron culture. Whatever it may, wanting to be as reductive and rigorous as possible, we know that the civilization of Este began in the 10th century, two hundred years before the founding of Rome.

Hut-urn. Castel Gandolfo, near Monte Cavo (Alban Hills). To be noticed is the hint to the Solar Boat through the heads of the two birds in the corner.

Early contacts with the Roman area date back to the Venetulani, who were perhaps related to the Roman tribe of the Luceres (who practiced incineration with hut-urns). Hut-urns have often been thought to bear indigenous influences, but they were typical of

Central Europe and of the Lower Vistula, a "Venetic" area not far from the Gdańsk Bay (*sinus Veneticum*). The Venetulani were among the thirty communities of Albans who performed sacrificial activities in the Alban Hills on Monte Albano (now called Monte Cavo), near the Albano volcanic lake. Pliny mentions them among the components of the ancient Holy League of Alba Longa. The name Venetulani could come from a 'Veneti settlement' called perhaps *Venetulum* (as *Tusculum* is the original place of the Tusci). With the destruction of Alba Longa, Rome became the hegemonic city of Lazio.

The oldest written document in Latin, the "Praeneste fibula", dates back to the 7th century BC while the oldest Venetic inscription (the *kantharos* of Lozzo, apparently dedicated to the Dioscuri) dates back to the 6th century BC. In connection to the debated linguistic aspect, Pellegrini says that "the Venetic language appears to us as an independent Indo-European language that documents several isoglosses in common with Latin." According to others, all the specific morphological features of the Venetic language differ from Latin and those which seem to be similar have a different distribution of relevant forms. However, the similarities between Latin and Venetic (i.e., lexical correspondences like the Venetic *ė·Xo* and the Latin *ego*) seem to be more numerous than those between Latin and Italic. This suggests that the Latins and the Veneti established themselves in Italy several centuries before the Osco-Umbrians. Moreover, according to Giacomo Devoto, three elements contributed to the genesis of Latin, one of which came from the north and was the Venetic language. This would partly explain the analogies with proto-Latin; however, after 150 BC, there was also a reverse influence from Latin to Venetic.

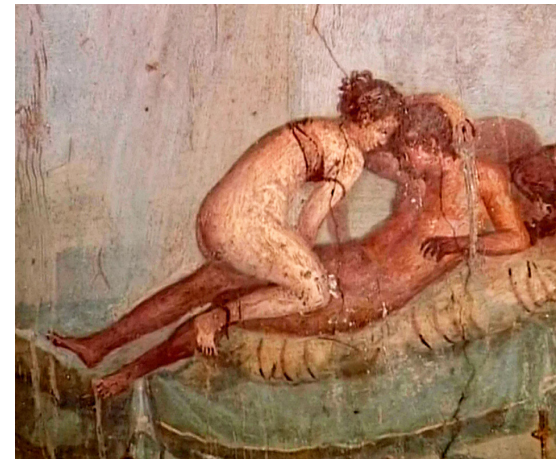
The Veneti were experts in hydraulic engineering and created an extremely precise grid of roads and irrigation canals north to Padua (mistakenly called *Graticolato Romano* because it was actually of Venetic origin). They also built several roads, which were then fixed and renamed in Roman times. It is, thus, plausible that the Romans followed ideas already put forward by the Veneti in the field of hydraulics, construction and road planning.

Among the many famous Venetic figures who influenced Roman culture, there is the Paduan Livy, who starts the First Book of his remarkable work on the History of Rome by telling the legend of the origins of the Veneti.

Rhea Silvia and the wolf (photo by Elido Turco)

To a certain extent, the myth of Rhea Silvia (Ilia), the priestess of Vesta, recalls the goddess Reitia and her totem animal – the wolf – almost as if in ancient-most times there was in the peninsula a common religious basis for both the Veneti and the Romans.

Well-known are these verses by Catullus, so unluckily in love with the fickle and litigious Lesbia: *I hate and I love. Why I do this, perhaps you ask me? I do not know, but I feel it happening and I am being torn apart.*



Erotic fresco from Pompeii

Gaius Catullus, descendant of the rich Roman family of the Valerii and poet of Verona, was certainly not tender in his poems about Caesar. The focus of these invectives was often on the military conquest of Britain. Were Catullus and his close friend the poet Licinius Calvus under the influence of a part that was adverse to Julius Caesar?

Catullus' conservative, albeit somewhat apathetic, political orientation emerges in the profound disgust with which he describes Nonius and Vatinius, two of Caesar's "creations". Certainly, his judgment on Caesar's supporters is more severe than that on Caesar's opponents (*optimates*). Nonius was probably a figure based on Lucius Nonius Asprenas, a legate of the triumvirate in Africa and Spain (accused by Cassius of having poisoned 130 diners). Vatinius, instead, fought with Caesar in the last year of the Gallic Wars and was consul for a short period during the Civil War.

In the following *carmen*, intense is Catullus' indignation for their dazzling and undeserved political careers and for the enormous wealth they accumulated because they were friends of the almighty triumvirs and thus protected by Caesar. In the verses there is pessimism toward Roman political life *tout court*: the initial refrain, repeated at the end, is the excruciating cry of the sense of justice, which prefers death to the uselessness of protest and to the impotence towards so much abuse of power. Or was it poison's fear? He died at only thirty (apparently due to an illness) just after Caesar's invasion of Britain.

What is it, Catullus? Why do you delay in dying?
That pimple, Nonius, sits in the magistrate's chair;
Vatinius perjures himself by his consulship!
What is it, Catullus? Why do you delay in dying?

Under Caesar's patronage, the military campaigns made Mamurra extremely rich. According to Cornelius Nepos (mentioned by Pliny the Elder), he was the first Roman to have his own house in Mount Celio. The house was entirely covered with marble and with beautiful columns. Catullus attacked him over and over again for his outrageous and lustful lifestyle; he also nicknamed him "*mentula*" (an obscene word for the penis) and accused him of having a homosexual relationship with Caesar. In the Roman era, male homosexuality was considered dishonourable and that was seen by the poet as an "indelible stain" for Caesar, even if he also courted women. Later on, Catullus apologised to Gaius Julius Caesar, who immediately invited him to dinner.

Erotic fresco from the Thermal Baths of Pompeii

The shameless effeminates agree quite nicely
Mamurra the pathic and Gaius Caesar too.
No wonder: stains, equal in each case,
One from the city, the other for Formiae,
Are deep ingrained and can't be scrubbed away.
Equally perverted, twinned and reversible,
Both quite learned on the same little bench,
One no less greedy an adulterer than the other,
Rival comrades of and for the girls.
The shameless effeminates agree quite nicely.

***

Who is able to see this, who is able to endure it
Except someone who is shameless and a glutton and a gambler,
Mamurra has what the province of Gaul
Used to have in value as well as that of farthest Britain?
Cinaedus Romulus, will you see these things and put up with them?
And now that man thinks he is better than everyone and is overflowing
And he will walk through everyone's bedroom,
As a white dove or Adoneus?
Cinaedus Romulus, will you see these things and put up with them?

You are shameless and a glutton and a gambler.
Is it for this reason, unique commander,
You were on that farthest island of the west
So that he could gobble up everything 200 and 300 times?
What else is this except for wicked liberality?
First squandered was his good inheritance,
Second the plunder from the Black Sea, third
That of Spain, which the gold-bearing Tagus River knows.

Now there is fear in Gaul and Britain.
Why do you nurture this wickedness? What is this man able to do
Besides devour an oily inheritance?
Is it for this reason everything extravagant in the city
Has been destroyed, father-in-law and son-in-law?

The refrain of the "strange and distant" Britain returns in a poem to Lesbia. When Gaius Julius Caesar defeated the Veneti of Brittany – in 56 BC – Catullus was twenty-eight years old. He quotes this expedition in his last letter to his beloved Lesbia (pseudonym in honour of the famous poet Sappho, from the Lesbos Island, and identified in the Roman noblewoman Clodia).

Furius and Aurelius, companions of Catullus,
whether he penetrates the furthest of the Indies,
or the shore where the beating of the eastern
waves resonates far and wide,
whether he penetrates into the Hyrcanos or the gentle Arabs,
or the arrow-carrying Parthians,
or the seven fold Nile
which colours the plains,
whether he will go across the great Alps,
intending to see the great monument to Caesar,
or the Gallic Rhine or the horribly distant Britain,
you who are prepared to try all these things,
and whatever else the will of the gods will bring,
announce to my sweet love a few nasty words.
Let her live and let her flourish with her adulterers,
whom having embraced 300 of them at the same time,
she owns and keeps them,
truly loving none of them, but repeatedly breaking the groins of all of them;
nor, let her no longer look back for my love as before,
which by her fault, has fallen,
just like the farthest flower of the field
has been killed by a passing plow.

***

The head of Otho is quite puny,
legs of Herrius are half-washed and muddy,
delicate and light is the farting of Libo,
if not everything, I could wish that this displease
you and Sufficius, that old man rejuvenated....
you will be angered again by my unoffending
iambs, you one and only imperator.

Priapo, workshop in Pompeii

Undeniably the Northeast of Italy was an area of great strategic significance for the future dictator Julius Caesar, who was often present in the region. For example, he used to lead his legions to Aquileia to pass the winter. Oderzo, an ex Balto-Venetic market and one of the oldest cities of the Upper Adriatic (*Opitergium*, 11th century BC) gradually passed under Roman control and become a *municipium* at Caesar's will. Gaius Julius Caesar also founded Cividale, to whom he gave the name of *Forum Iulii*, a denomination then extended to the whole Friuli, and Zuglio – an ancient Roman town founded in Carnia Mountains with the name *Iulium Carnicum*. Finally, with his successor Augustus the lands of the *Venetia* region were assigned to veterans.

Historically, what was the strategic military framework of the Northeast in Caesar's times? With which pretext did the Roman power insinuate itself in the Adriatic gulf to establish a powerful colony? In the first decades of the 2nd century BC Rome already exercised its control over almost all of Northern Italy. When Caesar became the proconsul of the Illyricum provinces for five years, the Istrian wars had already come to an end (they lasted from the end of the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century BC). In the third Istrian war (129 BC), the Iapyges and the Istrians were strongly attacked, driven away from their harbours and made tributaries of the Romans. The Istrian wars had been justified mainly by the fight against piracy that prevented trade with the Veneti and, secondly, by the goal to occupy the Istrian peninsula between the gulfs of Trieste and Rijeka. In fact, with the pretext of these wars, the Romans massively colonised the area of Aquileia (181 BC). Being a departure point for the infantry and the navy, this area allowed the Romans to establish their supremacy in the Northern Adriatic. The expansion of the Aquileia colony was not, however, due only to the war against the pirates and maritime supremacy: among the important strategic reasons there were also the expansion plans towards Noricum and Pannonia and the need to protect the Alpine passes from the Celts.

As in the past, Rome was protected by the allied army of the Veneti. In Caesar's times, the Taurisci and the Carni were not a menace, but rather a northeast source of mercenaries for the Roman army and what Rome appreciated the most was the easy way in which new recruits were enlisted in this area. Why, then, did Caesar want to strengthen his control in the region at all costs and to pivot on Friuli, thereby wedging the Roman presence between the Veneti in the Adriatic area and those in the Slovenian area? What can be supposed is a covert strategy of expansion at the expense of the Veneti in order to definitively incorporate them. Even in ancient times, the commercial wealth of the Veneti was envied by their neighbours and the Roman Aquileia robbed them of their commercial primacy, including in the amber trade. In Roman times, in fact, the amber road passed through Aquileia as witnessed by the numerous Aquileian ambers in the revival of carved amber (1st and 2nd century AD). The Baltic amber was imported raw in Aquileia and then processed on site and re-exported as ornamental objects. The northern origin of the raw material was already known to Tacitus, who wrote about how the Aestii would go out to sea in search of amber.

Initially Julius Caesar took control over the Illyrian province and in 58 BC dislocated three legions in Aquileia: it is obvious that he sought for glory and riches in this area to increase his political power and his military force. Caesar needed to demonstrate his talent to the Roman world with important military victories which could increase his prestige and counterbalance the power that Pompeo had created with his victories in the East. The pretext that Caesar was using to justify the wars seemed to be the growing threat of the Dacian tribes which, under King Burebista, were dangerously approaching from present-day Romania Italy and the Roman Illyricum, after having crossed the Danube and having conquered the whole Hungarian Plain. Therefore, taking advantage of this opportunity, Caesar was planning an offensive over the Carnic Alps to the Danube. Burebista's armies suddenly stopped, perhaps out of the fear of Caesar's intervention. Back in Transylvania, Burebista attacked the East, where he destroyed the Greek colony of Odessa.

Caesar's next step in 56 BC to complete his aim of dominating Veneti's trade routes, after the appropriation of the amber route in Aquileia, was to control the tin route which was in the hands of the Brittany Veneti. Why didn't the local Veneti oppose these plans? Although the Veneti had a new market in the Roman area, it is however true that they were losing their monopoly over the amber and tin trade. Did the local Veneti protest against Caesar's war on their "cousins" in Brittany? When Caesar fought against Pompeo and his faction of *Optimates*, the Veneti sided with Caesar (49 BC). Only seven years had passed since Caesar's invasion of the territories belonging to the Brittany Veneti (56 BC); yet their subjugation to Caesar appeared several times during his military exploits and the story goes that in the year 49 BC, during the Battle of Curicta (Krk, in Illyria), a maniple of Opitergins had started to kill each other rather than fall under the power of Pompeo. Why did the Opitergins – with a fleet of a thousand men – side with Caesar? Their commercial interests were more toward Central and Northern Europe than toward the East controlled by Pompeo. Perhaps Caesar had managed to gain the favour of the Veneti by tempting them with these expectations and by supporting the *Transpadanorum cause* – a movement that already from 77 BC wanted to grant full citizenship and full privileges to the inhabitants of the northern regions. Caesar initiated a legislative process that granted Roman citizenship to all members of the communities in the *Venetia* and transformed the main urban centres in *municipalities* governed by the *leges municipales*. However, behind these generous concessions, he lurked the final push toward the unification of the *Venetia* region under the Roman power. The late rebellion of the Paduans against the legions of Mark Antony – heir to Caesar's monarchic plans – was useless.

EAT LIKE THE ANCIENTS!

The favourite fish of the ancient Veneti was the Gò, now used especially for starters or *risotto*. Known as Goby, the Gò was caught in the winter season: with the low tide it hid in the sandbanks and the fishermen inserted their hands in the mud and inside the dens where they caught dozens of them. Among the river fishes, the ancient Veneti fished trout and pike (served with the famous "Venetic sauce") and also ate cooked shellfish, like mussels. Among the finds, there are many examples of *Glycymeris violacescens*, a massive orbicular, rounded and flesh-coloured shell, used in the form of pendants to be worn around the neck.

The Gò (Zosterisessor Ophiocephalus). According to the Roman poet Marziale, it was an appetizer for dinners.

In the lagoon the ancient Veneti caught *el bisàto*, the eel. Laces and ropes for bows were made with eel skin. For centuries the reproduction of eels was a mystery that exerted the most creative hypotheses. Only recently it was discovered that eel eggs are laid in the Atlantic Ocean and hatch in the Sargasso Sea, in the North Atlantic Ocean. The reproductive instinct of eels is so strong that they are able to come out of the water of an enclosed pond, crawl the ground like a snake and go into the sea to migrate for thousands of kilometres. Eels have a lot of fat (about a quarter of fat on the total weight) but cooking them on the grill allows the excess fat to pour out.

In ritual banquets the Veneti ate roosters and ducks belonging to the species of *Anas penelope* and *Anas querquedula* (Garganey). Horses were often sacrificed, but it seems that it was forbidden to eat their meat. Commonly eaten meats included pork, lamb and beef; besides, the discovery of wild boar teeth may indicate that they were also used for food. Eggs and fresh cheeses like *ricotta* were also eaten.

The nutrition of the ancient Veneti was certainly healthier and more balanced than the foods currently served up by the food industry – refined products depleted of their essential nutrients and artificially enriched with salt, sugar, fat and gluten. Luckily, we are experiencing a revival of semi-whole wheat and "archaic" cereals, such as spelt and millet, which were favoured by the Veneti ancestors and are sold today in organic food stores in the form of beverages or grains to be boiled in same way as the rice. Millet has a high caloric value;

Millet

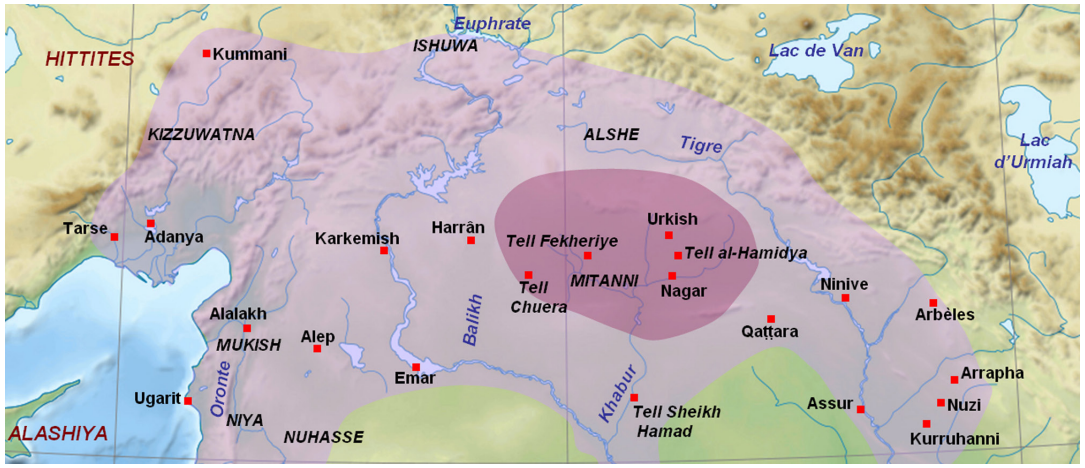
nowadays, however, it is preferred to focus on the modulatory role that the nutrients have on the DNA, rather than on an abstract concept such as the number of calories. Under this aspect millet contains proteins with a high biological value, higher in comparison to those of other cereals and a very high presence of sulphur amino acids (such as cystine and methionine). It is very rich in minerals – including iron, potassium, zinc, calcium, sodium, silicon, phosphorus, magnesium – and contains B-complex vitamins, vitamin A, E and B3. It also has a minimum amount of salicylic acid (aspirin component). Dehusked millet is gluten free: gluten is not only responsible for the Celiac disease but also for a form of intolerance that causes numerous non-specific disorders, even if the diagnostic test is negative. It seems that this intolerance is more present in people of the blood type 0, which still have DNA elements of the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic, whose only source of livelihood were game meat and fruits from trees.

Bread was eaten in the form of *focaccia* bread and flat unleavened bread. Barley, a cereal with a low glycemic load, is still present in the Veneto region cuisine. The ancients ate legumes (broad beans, peas, lentils) and vegetables with the exception of potatoes, eggplants and tomatoes, which were imported to Europe after the discovery of America, as was corn. Cornmeal bread (*polenta*) did not exist, obviously. The Veneti ate *Cornus mas*, a scarlet-red fruit with a sour taste, from a shrub with a hard wood. Wild fruits like strawberries, cherries, apples, pears and grapes were also gathered. Honey was used to sweeten *ricotta* cheese and creams. Important was the gathering of herbs (rosemary) and wild herbs for culinary use; salt was a precious condiment.

Hazelnuts were a very nutritious and with a high percentage of fat, even if they have unsaturated fats and Oleic acid, a substance useful for raising levels of the "good" cholesterol (HDL). Their content of vitamin E acts as a natural antioxidant capable of slowing down cellular aging and counteracting the action of free radicals; lastly their quantity of magnesium and manganese enters actively into the bone metabolism.

Accurate research has revealed that the first grape harvests can be attributed to the peoples who lived in the mountains near the southern coast of the Black Sea. *Situlae* from the *Venetia* often depict men and women who raise their glasses in sign of toast or offering to the gods. Since the 7th century BC the Retico wine produced in *Raetia* was used; Acinatico, which can be considered the ancestor of Recioto, was a sweet wine served spicy and diluted with water. Pliny the Elder listed the wines of the mouth of the Timavo River as the best wines; they could have originated today's Prosecco through the *Pùcinum* or *Puxinum*. In fact, in 1593 the English gentleman Fynes Moryson noted: *Here growes the wine Pucinum, now called Prosecho, much celebrated by Pliny.*

Raboso wine grapes (Borgo Malanotte)



Lake Van (up on the right) bordering the kingdoms of Isuwa and Mitanni.

Lake Van – which spreads over a huge area – is located in the Armenian area of Anatolia. In Kurdish the "*ê*" vowel appears in the lake's name as *Behra Wanê*. Jožko Šavli goes as far as identifying the meaning of 'Paradise' in the term *van* of the Venetic inscriptions of Este and Carlo Forin, an expert of Babylonian culture, hypothesised a primordial home of the Veneti at Lake Van, with their subsequent displacement to the north-west, in Paphlagonia.

Strabo quoted the Heneti as White Syrians and Hittite sources report that in the neighbouring Syrian region there was a community with a strange Venetic-like name: -*Wa-na-at-ti-ja-ta*. The identity of this tribe is a dense mystery. The only vague Venetic clue is a close relationship between Anatolia and horse-breeding. For example, the name of the "Isuwa" kingdom means 'land of horses'. The Isuwa kingdom was in the upper region of the Euphrates: this river valley was surrounded by the Anti-Taurus Mountains in the south, while in the northeast the river flowed in a vast plain that stretched to the Black Sea mountain chain. In the 1st millennium BC the Isuwa kingdom was surrounded by the Hittites in the northwest, by the Urartians in the east and by the Hattians and Hurrians in the south. The Isuwans did not leave written sources and therefore it is unclear which Anatolian people inhabited the land of Isuwa, before the Luvi. It could well have been an Indo-European community like the Luvi: in the land of Isuwa, in fact, the terminology associated with horses contained many words of Indo-European origin.

Isuwa was linked to Mitanni, a neighbouring kingdom located in Northern Mesopotamia which, at the peak of its expansion, extended from Lake Van to the south of the Zagros Mountains up to the borders with Assyria. Around 1600 BC an Iranian Indo-Aryan community called Mitanni had established itself as a warrior class among the Hurrians. Moreover, a written work found at Hattusa talks about training horses and the horse-trainer was a Hurrian. Teshub was the Hurrian god of the sky and storm. In the Hurrian and Hittite cultures, the bull – sacred animal of the Neolithic in Çatalhöyük – was a symbolic representation of Teshub with a horned crown, while the bulls Seri and Hurri (Day and Night) led his war chariot or carried him on their backs.

In the 13th century the flag of St. Mark was not yet the fundamental reference for the Venetian nobles, who instead identified themselves in their family emblem – a coat of arms representing the extended family, which included all the relatives and the remotest ancestors with the same surname. The distance between the nobles and the doge – a representative figure with few real powers – was so little that every patrician of Venice was elevated to a social class close to that of a prince. The Serenissima Republic of Venice was an aristocratic republic but, owing to its enlightened government, for its time it was a precursor of modernity. At a certain point there was the need to create an emblem to unite Venice's common people in peace and in war. The chosen emblem was the flag with the winged lion. The crimson red colour probably comes from the purple Byzantine imperial drapes with gold inserts; the six classic tails symbolise the six districts of Venice (as can also be seen in the iron prow of gondolas). It is important to distinguish two different components in the flag: the official aspect for which the emblem was henceforth adopted as the inseparable flag of the Serenissima Republic of Venice, and the other aspect which preceded this adoption and refers to the ancient myth related to this symbol.

Before St. Mark and until the year 828, the patron saint of Venice was St. Theodore of Amasea, who, according to the tradition, was from Paphlagonia (today Northern Turkey). The decision to opt for St. Mark led to the use of the Evangelist's animal symbol, the lion. The message associated with the lion *Pax tibi Marce evangelista meus* dates back to the *Historia longobardica seu legenda sanctorum* of the Dominican Jacopo da Varazze. The Evangelists are depicted with the four known symbols of Tetramorph, a sort of chimera that appears in the prophecies of Ezekiel: *As for the form of their faces, all four had the face of a man and, at the same time, each had the body of a lion on the right and the body of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle.* Ezekiel was deported to Babylon in 597 BC and it is possible that he was influenced by the colourful Mesopotamian mythology.

St. Theodore of Amasea

In Venice, the winged lion on the *Piazzetta* in front of the Doge's Palace is much older than the evangelical attribution and dates back to pre-Christian times, and more precisely to the 4th century BC. According to scholars of archaeo-metallurgy it originally had two horns on the forehead: we can still see the furrows of where the horns laid before being chipped away. The statue came to Venice from a temple from the so called "door to the east", i.e. Anatolia, and winged lions with horns were carved in Paphlagonia too. Why then did the Serenissima Republic of Venice choose the Winged Lion as an emblem? Most probably, by enriching the iconography of the lion with wings, the Venetians of the second half of the 14th century could not have known that their distant Veneti ancestors had already used the image of the Winged Lion in their bronze works of pre-Roman times,

as witnessed by the Benvenuti Situla (a masterpiece of ancient Venetic art) and in some votive objects retrieved by archaeological discoveries. This aspect deserves some reflection since in the Venetian Middle Ages there was no archaeological data about the ancient Veneti. Was it, thus, a mere coincidence or was there a Venetic oral tradition that wanted to keep alive certain cultural affinities? This is one of the many mysteries of Venice.

Speaking of symbolism, it is worth stating that an image per se has no other meaning than the literal one. Something takes a symbolic meaning only when seen in relation to something else, especially when there is a polarity relationship. In ancient times in Venice there was the recurring ritual of the bullfight, which took place in Campo San Polo and was similar to the Spanish event with the same name in Pamplona. The doge's horn, to which the Venetian nobility submitted, was clearly a symbol of power; essentially the Doge's headgear was a Phrygian cap, a fact which once again brings us back to Anatolia, where there was the central region of Phrygia. The horn has a clear virile meaning: what is a horn if not something hard capable of penetrating into the flesh? In the Phrygian iconography the theme of the fight between the lion and the bull was typical: the lion represents a hungry mouth, whose combination with the feminine aspect is intuitive and requires no explanation. This may seem trivial and almost irreverent but it was not so for the ancients. We often forget that the culture of the ancients was completely different from ours and we cannot use our modern mentality to judge them. We have to tiptoe into their unknown world.

The beautiful Mother goddess associated with the lion is a given, already documented during 6000 BC in Anatolia with the statue of Çatal Hüyük's great goddess, on a throne between the two felines. This smart goddess is then embodied by a long list of female divinities: the Egyptian goddess Kadesh naked on a lion's back, the Anatolian goddess Cybele always with a feline, the Assyrian Ishtar with a lion under her right foot, the Phoenician Astarte and, inside the Indo-European sphere, even the nice Hindu goddess Durga sitting over her lion. There is an 18th century painting by Giambattista Tiepolo in which Neptune pours the horn of plenty at Venice's feet, depicted as a woman holding her left hand on a lion. Those who have had the luck of capturing the lioness' gaze pointing the prey, know that everything during the hunt is handled by the lionesses and that the lion's roar is powerful only because he needs to prevail when the time to eat the prey comes.

When it comes to symbols, anyone can assign them a personal meaning according to his own inclinations and mental projections: they can be considered as positive or negative; they can entice or be ignored; their original meaning can be altered, modified, adapted to the times, replaced or renewed. Yet, we must be careful, because someone has endowed that symbol with an original meaning and a written text has assigned it a myth. The oldest attestation of the winged feline myth comes from the cradle of civilization, Babylon: it is the winged lion with a body covered in feathers, who moves his claws standing on eagle talons. In iconography this feline is the monster named Anzu, whose myth dates back to that of the cosmic deeds performed by the ancient Tiāmat, the Genetrix Goddess in Mesopotamian religion, the Lady of Chaos and of the primordial ocean.

The iconography of the stone bas-relief found in the temple of the god Ninurta at Nimrud (Iraq) is controversial. Its interpretation has changed over time. In 1989 Stephanie Dalley commented the relief as a fight between Ninurta and Anzu. It is, indeed, true that the stone object from the late 3rd millennium was found in the temple of the Sumerian god Ninurta. However Anzu had a mild and benevolent personality for the Sumerians, so benevolent that the hero Lugalbanda only feeds his offspring while Anzu is absent. The matter should be considered as follows: subsequent writings, namely, the *Epic of Anzu* (early 2nd millennium) and the *Enûma Eliš*, in which Tiamat appears (1st millennium), are variations of the same mythological theme. Both stories include the struggle for the possession of the Tablet of Destinies as a key element; the weapons used in the fighting are the same; structurally also the stories were similar because three gods were send in turn to the mission and only one triumphed; finally, even the proclamation of new names and appellations for the winner is similar.

In Mesopotamian mythology, the heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu are given the ability to tame lions and

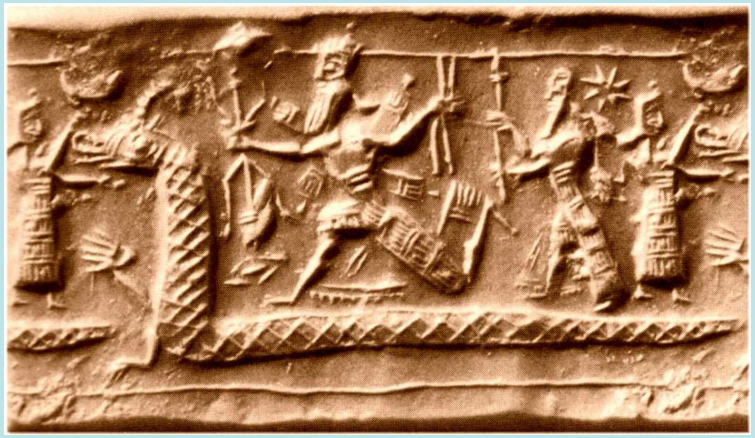
Anzu, monster of primordial Chaos (according to Stephanie Dalley)

these characters are often portrayed while taming or defeating lions. Like Gilgamesh, in Greek mythology the hero Heracles is able to defeat lions: among his features there is the killing of the fearsome Nemean lion, whose skin the hero always wears.

Therefore, the Babylonian winged lion would ultimately be the image of Anzu, because of this male god there is the carved image of an eagle with a lion's head, which corresponds in the text to references to feathered wings, to the roar similar to that of the lion and to the horns similar to those of a bull. There seems instead to be no direct iconography of the goddess Tiamat. Which is then the iconographic image of Tiamat, the Goddess of salt waters, Lady of Chaos and of the primordial ocean?

The verses of the Enûma Eliš, in which Tiamat appears, are as follows:

When the sky above was not named,
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,
And the primeval Apsû, who begat them,
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both,
Their waters were mingled together,
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;
When of the gods none had been called into being.



According to a cuneiform text, Tiamat was 50 *kasbu* long, her mouth was half a gar, that is, six cubits wide; the goddess moved below the surface of water deep 9 cubits and the height of her undulations was one *kasbu*. To get an idea of her size, the *kasbu* was usually the distance covered in a two-hour trip (about 9 km). A length of 50 kasbu was thus the equivalent of 450 kilometres and the undulations corresponded to 9 kilometres. The cubit was half a meter; this means that her mouth was 3 meters wide and she swam at 4.5 meters under the surface. Such a size, and the fact that she swims underwater makes the use of wings unlikely, and suggests instead the idea of a sea snake-dragon. The Uranic element appears only when the hero Marduk cuts Tiamat in two like a fish to be dried while she moves creating waves and pulls half of her out to cover the sky.

Doge Francesco Foscari, from a painting by Lazzaro Bastiani from Padua (ca. 1460)

It is legitimate to think that the Veneti put the most important and intimate symbol of their tradition on the head of their most eminent spokesman. The Ducal horn, namely the doge's headgear, is an emblem that opens up a limitless world of unknown meanings, ignored by both modern man and Veneti themselves. In order to understand this symbolism in depth, it is necessary to start from far away. In prehistoric times, during the Bronze Age, the Proto-Veneti are presumed to have venerated a solar-type supreme deity, who was connected with the complex myth of the Solar Boat. When this deity ceased to be unique and all-embracing, it was matched to a lunar god. Well-known is the lunar god Menulis, who in Baltic mythology is the groom of the solar deity Saulė. The Indo-Aryan root **men* refers to the Moon and Menulis shares it with the Anatolian god "Men", the measurer of the months who is portrayed with a bull and the Phrygian cap on his head. The Phrygian cap, which was the prototype of the Ducal horn, was originally adopted by the Phrygian priests (Central Anatolia). Its shape derives from the entire skin of a

Teshub, Hurrian god riding a bull

The god Men with Phrygian cap and a foot on the bull's head

Sabazios, with lunar horn and feet on the bull, thracian divinity similar to the Greek Dionysus, especially from the point of view of the Orphic cult.

Among the Bacchantes the bull as the personification of Dionysus

goat kid, whose forelegs draw the distinctive tip. This cap became typical of the Persian tradition (6th - 2nd centuries BC) and was also worn by the Byzantine soldiers until the 9th century. In ancient Rome it was called *pileus* and given to freed slaves, the *liberti*. It always appears on the head of the god Mitra who slayed the bull and was the expression of a fairly widespread religion that rivalled the emerging Christianity. Finally, the Phrygian cap was also worn by Attis – the companion of the goddess Cybele –, whose self-castration recalls the mutilation of the Baltic Menulis (whose sense is clear in the Moon that mutilates a part of itself during the moon phases).

In Babylonian mythology the figure of the bull is generally connected to the Moon, as in the example of the lunar god Sin, and the same happens in Greek mythology where Dionysus is amenable to primal lunar motifs. At his birth Dionysus has bullhorns and is called "The Great Bull" in Euripides' *Bacchantes*.

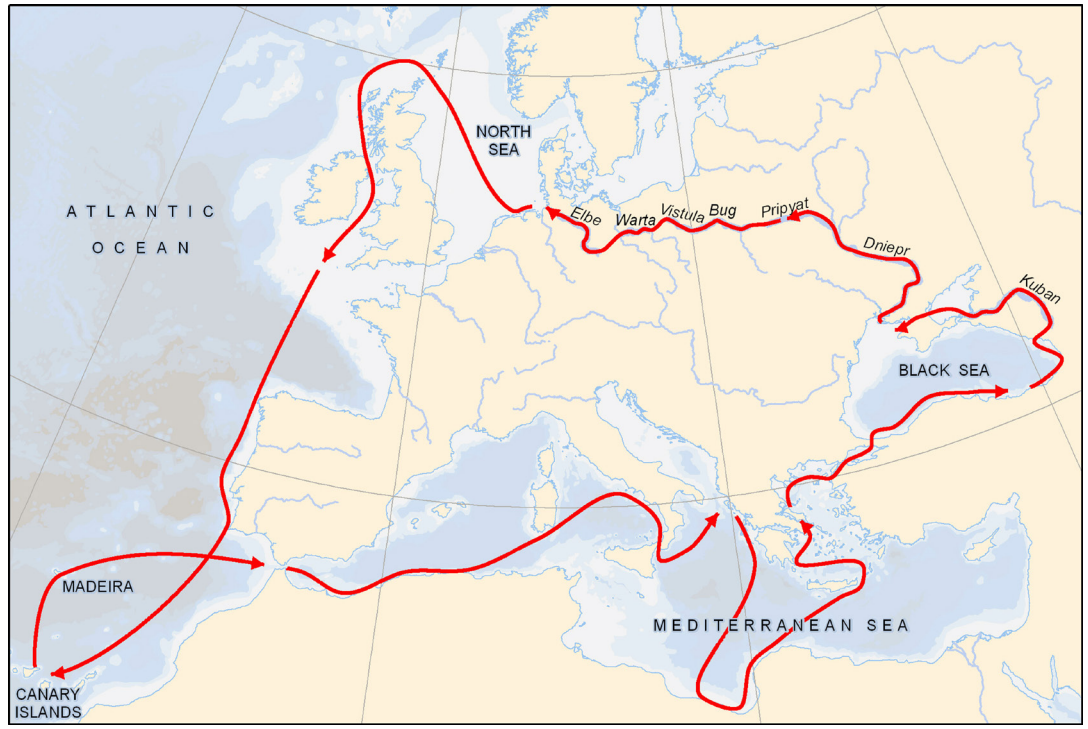
The reign of Ponto, which was initially a part of Paphlagonia, was founded in 281 BC by King Mithridates, who took his name from the cult of Mitra. While on the coasts the culture of the Greek settlers prevailed, in the inland the Paphlagonians still venerated the lunar god Men Pharnacou and the goddess Ma (considered to be Cybele). The ancient people of Pala, who originally lived in Paphlagonia, sacrificed a bull to their highest god, Zaparwa. Everything is clear and the Veneti's circle is closed.

The moon and the bull are also features of Shiva, the god of transformation who fits in well in the lunar rotation. Like Dionysus, he is a dancing god and like Attis he also self-castrates himself: *Shiva threw the "linga" (phallus) on the earth and made a hole that went down to the Underworld and up to the sky. Visnu and Brahma couldn't find the two ends, so they adored him.*

The god Shiva, with the bull and the lunar sickle

Enviable is the clear uncertainty with which wise people recognise their limits of knowledge. They understand that most of our certainties cannot be demonstrated and, the few that can be demonstrated, in a few years will be overcome by future discoveries. Therefore our daily actions are triggered first and foremost by the irrational. The progresses of scientific investigation depend on the use of new mathematical and technological instruments which allow us to see things that, without the new point of observation provided, would otherwise remain hidden. European history reveals unexpected horizons and many new considerations can be made if it is re-evaluated and re-written "from the Venetic point of view": to dig up the past of the Veneti with this method, deeper and deeper, can mean the discovery of a true gold mine which is under our feet without knowing it.

Strabo wrote: "It can be said without hesitation that both at sea and on land the Ancients undertook more admirable journeys than the Moderns". An apt example of the combination between historical truth and mythical invention is the journey of the Argonauts. Particularly interesting because, after having left Colchis (Georgia), these seekers of the Golden Fleece sailed on board the Argo probably along the same Ponto-Baltic way used by the ancient Veneti. According to Dimitris Michalopoulos, professor of Maritime history at the Hellenic Naval Academy, the first stop of the Argonauts along the Black Sea coast may have been the famous Maeotis Swamp, in the Sea of Azov



The journey of the Argonauts across the Ponto-Baltic route (map by Mike Athanson).

delimited by the Crimean peninsula. There the Argonauts may have met the descendants of the mysterious Cimmerians: the Tauro-Scythians who systematically killed all foreign sailors and celebrated Artemis with chalices full of human blood. After having escaped the danger, they sailed north. In order to reach the peaceful tribe of the Hyperboreans – the destination achieved together with Orpheus in the *Argonautica* – they either could choose to sail up the Tánaïs, that is the River Don which flows directly into the swamp, or to go beyond the peninsula and sail up the Borystène, that is the Dniepr. Being three kilometres wide, the calm waters of the Borystène were easy to navigate even counter current and were thus probably the best choice for the 2000-kilometre journey which attended the Argonauts before reaching – among the Hyperboreans, at the other end of the known lands – "the Sea of Kronos". Northwards the heroic travellers had to pass the big territory of the Scythians which, during its maximum (albeit brief) period of expansion, extended from Eastern Germany to Afghanistan and included Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. Going up the Dniepr, the ship steered into the swampy River Pripyat (80 kilometres north of present-day Kiev) and the travellers were forced to get out of the ship and carry it on their shoulders with ropes tied to the stern. When they reached the waters of the western Bug, they finally entered the riverbed of the Vistula, north of present-day Warsaw. Apparently the Argonauts simply travelled along the most ancient of the Amber Ways, which connected the Pontus with the Baltic and that passed through territories – like the swamps of Pripyat - which had been inhabited by the Venedy for a millennium.

Close to the conclusion, the question regarding the Baltic-Anatolian or indigenous origin of the Veneti remains "open", just like the enigma of the Anatolian or autochthonous origin of the Etruscans. We know that in the Italian peninsula the Italian genes are totally mixed up. However the haplogroups of male line and their subclades – which are not genes but silent DNA – are much more specific in the field known as DNA Genealogy. It is thus difficult to understand why Italian geneticists stubbornly focused on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) as a marker of the Etruscans, even if mtDNA – that is, the mother's line - does not give us information in 99% of the cases. If we consider the example of a harem, there is one single haplogroup and haplotype generated by the male, but there are at least one hundred variations of the female mtDNA. The dating of mtDNA mutations is still controversial, as it is based on a series of contrasting theories and mtDNA passes down to the descendants only for one generation. Nobody takes the studies on mtDNA seriously, and yet inconclusive studies continue to be published – perhaps because it is easier to take data from mtDNA or maybe because with articles on Pop Genetics some look for sensational headlines on newspapers. Three studies on population genetics were published about in 2004, 2007 and 2012 in the main international academic journals. The first and the last study dealt with fossil mtDNA from bone remains probably belonging to the Etruscans, while the second was carried out on the mtDNA of the contemporary inhabitants of Tuscany – based on the assumption that they are in part descendants of the Etruscans (even if the Etruscans were soon assimilated in the Roman Empire and their lands were assigned to the veterans of the legions). As a result,

all three studies can be criticised for the accuracy of the scientific method used and they are in contrast with each other. The first study, which eliminated some material without a plausible reason, indicates a gene flow from the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean; not necessarily from Lydia, as Herodotus suggested. In 2007, however, Achilli carried out a study on 322 Tuscans which allegedly demonstrates that the Etruscans originated from the Near East, in accordance with the Anatolian origin stated by Herodotus. Finally, in a recent article on the Etruscans (2012), Ghirotto analysed 14 skeletons from Etruscan cemeteries and he seems to have discovered that the population under examination came from Anatolia but migrated to Tuscany 5000 years ago, when the historical Etruscans did not yet exist: thus, the Etruscans as we know them would have been presumably indigenous.

Besides from haplogroups, the peculiarity of a population can also emerge surprisingly from the distribution of Rare Diseases. In Italy almost 45% of the cases of Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Dysplasia (ARVD) is concentrated in Veneto and 30 cases every 1000 inhabitants can be reached in the province of Rovigo. This disease can thus be the main threat of death for young athletes in the Lower Po Valley. According to a pilot article by the cardiologist Jean Louis Hebert (*Sur la trace des Vénètes. Histoire de la diffusion de la dysplasie ventriculaire droite arythmogène à travers l'Europe*), outside Veneto ARVD is concentrated in Brittany and Poland, both known as Venetic areas. To these he also adds the area of the Cyclades, which was seat of the Duchy of Naxos – an island conquered by the Venetian Marco Sanudo in 1205 – during the period of the territorial expansion of the Serenissima. Since ARVD is caused by the mutation of many genes, and not of just a single gene, it is not suitable for population studies, as it is not possible to single out the sequence of the variation which can be indicated as typical of the Veneti. The ARVD disease has a genetic cause in 50% of the cases (alteration of the proteins of cardiac desmosomes) and is prevalent in males; yet, since it also affects females, there is no point in attempting to identify a haplogroup which is characteristic of the Veneti in the carriers of the disease. However, if we replicate Hebert's observation with correlated statistical analyses of disease prevalence and incidence, there can be broad research perspectives even on other Rare Genetic Diseases, which – we must say – can already epidemiologically be used as population markers and consequently provide independent information regarding migrations, which is as reliable as the data provided by haplogroups. It must be explained that the genes of Rare Diseases and genetic diseases in general, are markers which cannot be "directly" associated with the Veneti, as the mutations under examination can be observed in the whole general population and not only in the Veneti. Nevertheless, these mutations can have the function of *indirect tracers* of the settlement area of the ancient Veneti: the data collected can be the basis for the creation of "a map" that shows the distribution of the Rare Diseases studied at a European level. The use of indirect highlighting methods is not unknown to science: for example, the bubble chamber is used in Physics to highlight bubbles of particles which would otherwise be invisible to any other type of analysis.

Ethically, the study would not be aimed at curing the patients even if these severe diseases are serious and disabling and can often affect children. However, being an epidemiological study, it would not require blood samples from the patients. The possible

identification of areas with a greater concentration of a certain Rare Disease can favour the creation of official associations among the carriers of the same disease and may make it easier to find reference points within healthcare institutions, as well as stimulate research on causes and treatment because the researchers are aware of the existence of a circumscribed warm area. Indeed, even if the "non-uniform" distribution of these often forgotten diseases is well-known, both in Italy and abroad the prevalence of Rare Diseases is generally measured as a national average and not as that of single areas. Knowing that a given rare disease is more highly prevalent in a certain area allows the specialists and the General Practitioners "to take it into consideration more often and more promptly" at the moment of the diagnosis. For example, among hormonal diseases, the rare and complex Autoimmune polyendocrine syndrome type 1 (APS-1) certainly has a high frequency in Veneto, as the Vicenza-Bassano del Grappa area is a warm area for the disease; thus if a doctor from Vicenza or Bassano is not aware of this, he can underestimate its presence. Calculating prevalence among the Veneti – if we consider them as a specific population and not as a "region"– is more difficult to carry out because some of the patients monitored by the University of Padua come from other Italian regions (looking for highly specialised hospitals) and not all patients who live in the region are Veneti of origin. Therefore, in order to determine the real frequency of a rare disease among the Veneti, it is necessary to survey the patients of Veneto origin who are treated both in Veneto and in the rest of Italy and then compare them with the total inhabitants of Veneto. In this way it will be possible to calculate the frequency of the disease in the population of Veneto origin.

Favism, the congenital defect of a red blood cell enzyme known as glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase, has a high incidence in the Po delta. It is believed that this is connected with the local presence of Malaria in ancient times. However, sporadic cases of favism were also identified in Poland, a country which, despite the low prevalence of the disease (0.1%), is certainly not a Malaric area. Since favism affects at least 190,000 people in the world and the range of its mutations are known, the research method on these subjects with high specificity should concentrate not only on the Mediterranean variety, but also on "the mutations" that are typical of the Veneto area.

At a first glance in Brittany the "most frequent" Rare Diseases seem to be Haemochromatosis, Spina bifida and Steinert's disease. In the Vistula region the Kashubians studied by Krzysztof Rębała and Beata Lipska-Ziętkiewicz can be the target of an interesting genetic research because, even if they do not differ significantly from the rest of the Poles in terms of Y-chromosome polymorphism, they are an indigenous ethnic group that – according to some – descends from the Pomeranian culture, which in turn derives from the Lusatian one. Among the Kashubians there are a certain number of *founder-effect* (a small group of individuals with a low genetic variability) bearer of mutations which in some cases can produce an increased incidence of the following related pathologies: Long-chain 3-hydroxyacyl-coenzyme A dehydrogenase deficiency, familial hypercholesterolemia, hereditary breast and ovarian cancer and familial idiopathic steroid-resistant nephrotic syndrome. The prevalence of Long-chain 3-hydroxyacyl-coenzyme A dehydrogenase deficiency (LCHAD) is estimated worldwide in 1/250,000 at birth (the prevalence evaluates the proportion of patients who are present in a population in a certain moment). However, in the Baltic area the frequency is higher: the prevalence at birth is estimated in 1/115,000 in Poland and 1/20,000 in Pomerania (more than twelve times the global average); the prevalence is more frequent especially among the Kashubians than in the rest of Poland. In Italy the prevalence at birth is much less frequent than in Poland, while a two-year screening of new-borns in the five provinces of the Veneto Region revealed that the prevalence at birth of LCHAD, the rarest form of mitochondrial metabolism defects, was almost null.

The incidence of the other above-mentioned diseases in the Kashubians is the same as in the other Polish regions. However a typical mutation which characterises this population was found in their gene (for example, in Podocin-associated steroid-resistant nephrotic syndrome, the c.1032delT mutation was detected only in patients from the Kashubian region). The identification of these typical mutations in patients from Veneto can contribute to highlight an ancient relation between the two populations, which already have in common minimal percentages of the haplogroups E1b, J2 and T2. However, the timelines established by Krzysztof Rębała regarding the paternal genetics of the Kashubians are almost a perfect match with the historical and archaeological data regarding the European expansion of the Slavs in the 5th and 6th centuries and not with the Lusatian civilisation which dates back to at least 2500 years ago.

It is difficult to find epidemiological data on Rare Diseases, and Veneto's Register of Rare Diseases is almost completely unwilling to cooperate. On the other hand, there is widespread doubt about research on the haplogroups "of the present-day Veneti" because of the massive genetic mixing that is typical of all Italian regions. Indeed, the multidimensional scale from Giovanni Destro Bisol's map shows that the genetic distance between the Veneti and the inhabitants of other Italian regions is minimal. Thus, if we wanted to avoid the statistic distortion caused by the mixing and directly study the bone remains of the ancient Veneti, the only possibility would be to examine the skeletons of the first Christianized Veneti who were buried: since the ancient Veneti cremated the dead and the DNA of the ashes is, in fact, irremediably degraded and cannot be used for haplogroup tests.

In present-day Veneti – in order to discern between native or external origin of the ancient Veneti – the genetics of Rare Diseases could, instead, offer more reliable perspectives than the haplogroups, especially in those cases in which the presence of the Veneti was attested in ancient eras and then disappeared over time. Haplogroups could in fact diminish significantly or even disappear when an ancient population mingled with invaders or peaceful newcomers. On the contrary, the genes of Rare Diseases were transmitted to the new superimposed populations and continued to be passed on even when the original ancient population became extinct from a given area and cancelled its haplogroups. In the near future the now separate lines of research on haplogroups and genetic diseases could converge and perhaps solve – in one way or the other – the obscure dilemma regarding the indigenous or Baltic-Anatolian origin of Venetic populations. Researchers now have the technologies and expertise necessary to provide us with an answer soon.

Despite its heterogeneous and varied population, the Urnfield culture – which bred the tribe that originated the Adriatic Veneti – was characterised by religious homogeneity. Well-documented is, in fact, the almost missionary-like spread of new religious beliefs, which comprised sacral elements already found in previous periods of European prehistory. Yet, it was in the Urnfield culture that these sacral elements were, for the first time, organically connected inside a system of beliefs which created a unitary vision. For this reason, some archaeologists believe that the first elaboration of certain ideologies – which were later to be shared by different "Indo-European" religions in the historical era – dates back to the Urnfield culture era.

Very sparingly archaeologists dare to give interpretations about cults or the contents and meanings of Mythology. Although this attitude is understandable, it must not result in a total surrender in order to remain always and at all costs within the limits of analyses based on *scientific evidence*. As a general definition, evidence means the objective significance that something has in order to be undeniable. However, the demand for objectivity often reveals a lack of theoretical awareness about the possibilities that this concept provides us with. For this reason the expression and the level of evidence varies according to the different fields of study. Interdisciplinary studies on the ancient Veneti thus have different levels of scientific reliability, which are connected with the requirements of the single disciplines and their investigation methods.

The feasibility and scientific reliability of *Positivistic history* (the belief that "the facts speak for themselves") have been put into crisis by the hardly recoverable historiographic void due to the lack of documents even for long periods of time. In addition, in the past, there was the tendency to modify the facts in a mythical perspective or to modify chronicles for partisan reasons (typical of the "winners").

Linguistics is the discipline that studies human language – as an abstract human ability – and analyses its historical forms, namely historical-natural languages. The scientific reliability of this discipline, born officially in the second half of the 19th century with the studies of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is controversial. Although at the beginning it tried to be similar to the so-called "hard sciences", linguistics is rather considered as a "soft science".

In the 1970s the discipline known as *Processual archaeology* developed in the United States with the aim of placing archaeology among the exact sciences, especially in the prehistoric and proto-historic fields. This so-called "new archaeology" aimed at elaborating a completely new method which started off with theoretical hypotheses about big cultural processes and then sought confirmation through scientific methods (excavations). Post-processual archaeology, which developed in Great Britain, criticised above all the possibility of an objective and aseptic observation of the cultural phenomena and thought that the presumption of reaching an abstract scientific safeguards was inconsistent with the peculiarities of archaeological research. In the second half of the 20th century archaeology could also count on the use of technologies, such as aerial photography or radiocarbon dating.

An example of how scientific technologies can revolutionise our knowledge is provided by Colin Renfrew, who in 2001 employed radiocarbon data to prove that the

domestication of plants and animals spread from Western Anatolia to Greece 8500 years ago. Summarizing his theory, Renfrew declared that Proto-Indo-Europeans and their linguistic families originated in Central Anatolia during the Neolithic, nearly 9000 years ago, and from Western Anatolia they spread into the continent through agriculture. Linguistic changes in Greece and in the Danube and Balkan areas were the consequence of migrations dated back to 9000 and 7000 years ago. These movements, if compared with the European prehistory which emerges from the haplogroup model, are incompatible with the Kurgan theory put forward by Gimbutas. Therefore the Kurgan theory on the spread of the Indo-Europeans through waves of military expansions into the Ponto-Caspian steppe is losing credibility against Renfrew's Anatolian theory. The analysis of the current linguistic theories with reference to the data of DNA Genealogy shows that the Anatolian theory generally corresponds with the genetic data, although the linguistic theory does not say anything about the evolution of the Proto-Indo-Europeans before 9000 years ago.

Indo-European languages are classified into different groups. Today, alongside the Indo-Iranian group, the Slavic one is the most widespread if compared with Germanic or Romance languages. With reference to the relationship between the Venetic and Slavic languages, it is important to note that feminine Venetic nouns ending with *-na* (sometimes *-ina*) are a gamonimic derived from the husband's name, just like the parallel Slavic gamonimics ending with *-nā* and preceded by the possessive suffix. Lejeune has identified various isoglosses between Venetic and Slavic, which can be interpreted as evidence of "ancient" commercial contacts along the Amber Route, considering that "historic Slavic" migration arrived instead in the Adriatic 500 years after the last Venetic inscription. An example of the isoglosses is the ancient Eastern Slavic *tŭrgŭ* ('marketplace'), which resembles the Venetic *Oterg-*, the name of the city Oderzo then Latinized as *Opitergium*. According to Conrad Malte-Brun, the same meaning would be valid for Treviso (*Tarvisium*).

The scientific criteria of linguistic evidence include the internal logic of the changes that typify a language. The chronology and the territorial distribution of these changes are then compared with the development of other types of languages. The greater the possibility that two languages have the same origin, the more numerous and less accidental are the "common elements" among them, since they have enough specificity. With this method Jadranka Gvozdanović, from the University of Heidelberg, identified some similar linguistic elements shared by the Breton language of the Vannetais, the Venetic and the substrate of Slavic language. Her book *Celtic and Slavic and the Great Migrations* received the prestigious prise of "best contribution to Slavic linguistics" from the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages.

The new anthropology of the Veneti, like my previous book *La dea veneta*, collects all the clues that suggest an idea which is perhaps bold but sufficiently provided with valid requirements: the concept of a real cultural unity among the ancient populations sharing a "Venetic name" in so many regions of Europe. The bravest among experts of Linguistics, History, Mythology, Archaeology, Genetics and Anthropology are thus warmly encouraged to take up the challenge.

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